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Constructing victims: The gendering of domestic violence in the print media.

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**CONSTRUCTING VICTIMS:
THE GENDERING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE PRINT MEDIA**

by
Kameron Robinson

A Thesis submitted
to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Sociology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Masters of Arts at the
University of Windsor

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2003

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to explore gender constructions of domestic violence in Ontario newsprint media in the decade of the 1990s, and to examine the extent to which the victimization of male partners by female partners is under-represented during this time period, rendering male victims “invisible”. This issue is important in light of current controversies in Canada and the United States over the relevance of gender to domestic violence, and efforts by feminist and men’s rights advocates to shape social policy to reflect their respective perspectives on this issue. Based on content analysis of articles from the Toronto Star and the Toronto Sun, this thesis argues that social constructions of gender shape portrayals of domestic violence victimization in the print media. The thesis finds no support in the data, however, for the hypothesis that the print media under-represents male domestic violence victims, since rates of reported male and female victimization correspond roughly with the gender distribution of domestic violence victimization in police reports, as captured in Department of Justice statistics. On the other hand, there is support for the hypothesis that constructions of domestic violence are “gendered”, though support for this hypothesis is mixed and contradictory. Across papers, the majority of victims are female. Both genders, however, are depicted as innocent and worthy of protection when victimized, and both genders are depicted as unworthy when they are perpetrators. However, the political stance of the newspapers influence the amount of coverage that each gives to male victimization, and the language each uses in reporting. Each newspaper provides a slightly distorted portrayal of the gendered distribution of victimization, one slightly under-representing and the other slightly over-representing male victims. Consequently, sweeping generalizations cannot be made about the newsprint medias constructions of domestic violence and gender based upon the thesis findings. Further research in this area is needed.

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Introduction - Chapter One

Current Issues in Domestic Violence:

The issue of domestic violence against women is a high profile social problem, and has been recognized as such for close to three decades (Tierney 1982). Throughout this period, controversy has reigned over the definition of this problem, with feminists insisting upon policy initiatives that define the problem as primarily or exclusively a problem against women or wife battering, and family violence proponents arguing that policy needs to address the larger problem of violence in families, perpetrated against spouses and children by women as well as men (Gelles and Loseke 1993; Mann 2000). As the government of Canada publication Battered husband: An Overview of Research and Perspectives (Tutty 1999) demonstrates, while there is widespread acceptance of the need to support and protect women who are victimized by male partners, the abuse of men by women is controversial, hotly debated across feminist and men's rights camps. Men's rights advocates, who draw upon self-report surveys that "find" men and women perpetrate domestic assaults at equal rates, insist that women and men are equally victimized, and that they deserve equal support, recognition and protection. In contrast, feminist researchers, who draw upon hospital reports and police and homicide statistics, argue that women are clearly overwhelmingly the victims of serious violence or battering, and that there are very few battered men (for feminist arguments see Dobash and Dobash 1992, 1998; Yllo 1993; Ferraro 2001; Swan and Snow 2002; for family violence and men's rights arguments see Gelles and Straus 1986; Miller and Sharif 1995;

Williams and Williams 1995; Messner 1998).

At the heart of debates about the extent and nature of male versus female victimization and the appropriate policy responses to these phenomena is the issue of gender, and the varying ways family violence or men's rights proponents and feminists define and use this construct. Men's rights advocates argue that men have been placed in the "role" of perpetrator, and females in the "role" of victims, and that this stereotype disadvantages both genders (Messner 1998). They argue that as a consequence of gender-role stereotypes, male victimization has been rendered invisible. Feminists argue that gender is not simply a role, it is a relational process or "doing" constitutive of unequal social relations, lives and selves, and that gender neutral language and policies obscure and distort the instrumental use of violence by men to enforce or accomplish female subservience (West and Zimmerman 1987). Despite these differences, both men's rights and feminist camps recognize that gender is constructed, and that the construction of gender is a key element of policy implicated in efforts to reduce or eliminate domestic violence victimization.

This Study:

The purpose of this project is to look at gender construction of domestic violence in Ontario newsprint media, and to examine the constructions of gender in these discourses. I will explore how the newsprint media's portrayal of "men's rights" activism, domestic abuse, and male victims "fits" with gender ideologies as discussed in recent sociological and feminist theory. These issues are of particular importance in light of current

controversies in both Canada and the United States over the nature of domestic violence, and feminist and men's rights advocates' reactions to the issue. The project's specific concern is with how men are constructed within popular and academic discourses, and placed into explicit roles in the arena of domestic violence. Throughout this work, there is particular interest in media and academic portrayals of the efforts of men's rights activists to oppose what they refer to as the "myth" of the nonviolent female (Farrell 1993; Miller and Sharif 1995; Williams and Williams 1995; Pearson 1997). This thesis will examine these activities as part of the contested terrain upon which we presently construct or "do" gender in Canada (Arias et al. 1986; Hartmann 2000).

In order to explore media constructions of domestic violence and gender, I will conduct a content analysis of two major Ontario newspapers, published between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2000. The two newspapers are published provincially in Ontario, principally for local municipal audiences, the Toronto Star and the Toronto Sun. These municipal papers provide insights into national trends while still focussing on provincial occurrences, and provide adequate coverage of domestic violence in Ontario. In addition, analysing these two newspapers provides two very different perspectives on the same topic within the same area. Each media source covers stories regarding domestic violence on a regular basis. The coverage on domestic violence encompasses accounts of both male and female victims of assault and stalking, as well as domestic homicide. This project explores whether these two media sources treat perpetrators differently based on gender. Of course, one cannot expect to find a unitary opinion. The Star and the Sun both have different biases, as do individual journalists and reporters

writing for these papers, and these biases are inevitably reflected in their coverage of the issues. As such, there are multiple perspectives in both newspapers.

The theoretical or analytic stance of this thesis is a “weak” or “contextual” version of social constructionism, as advanced in social problems sociology (Best 1993; Mann 2000). This theoretical stance directs social researchers to focus primary attention to the deconstruction of claims and the interests behind claims, their own as well as others. It views “conditions” (Blumer 1971) or “realities” defined as social problems, not as definitive empirical phenomena, but as historically, politically and ideologically constructed possibilities for viewing and responding to changing conditions (Mann 2000:6; see also Troyer 1993). Constructionists recognize that “investigations of conditions involve researchers in the *very* definitional processes a sociology of social problems seeks to analyse, and that investigations of conditions force researchers to “take sides” in political struggles over the nature of the problem and how to address it” (Mann 2000:6). This is key to research on social problems.

The context in this thesis is the ongoing contention over the meanings and relevance of gender to domestic violence across feminist and men’s rights camps. Official reports, surveys and other means of tapping domestic violence in media reports are important components of the context as well. They are resources that contending camps use to advance their claims and policy goals.

My working hypothesis is that the print media will under-represent male domestic violence victimization, and that it will promote policy focussed principally on female victimization. I further hypothesize that the Star and the Sun draw upon and reproduce

gender stereotypes that render male victimization “invisible”. Since my theoretical stance is constructionist, I do not expect to find or reveal truths about domestic violence - my hypotheses address constructions of the problem, not their truth. On the other hand, I do expect to find intelligible patterns in media reports and commentary on this social problem, and I expect these to make sense in the context of the official data and survey evidence that contending claims makers draw upon.

It is important to note that my motivation for conducting this research project is rooted in concern over what I perceive to be a lack of attention to male victims of domestic violence in popular and academic discourses. It is not possible to remain completely “objective” when conducting research on controversial social issues, especially when research relies on content analysis. It is important, however, to acknowledge biases, and work to avoid allowing these to dominate. I do so, remembering that as a social constructionist my task is not to verify hypotheses or discount “realities”, but to explore how domestic violence and gender are constructed in the contending and overlapping social arenas examined in my research. These arenas are reports and commentary on domestic violence incidents and policy in two Toronto newspapers, the Star and the Sun, over the decade of the 1990s. Although my working hypotheses or hunches on what these media sources would accomplish in their constructions of domestic violence and gender cannot, in the strict positivist sense of the term, be “tested” through qualitative content analysis, such an analysis can provide, or fail to provide, support for my “concern” that the media are biased against male victims. This is what the thesis hopes to accomplish.

Outline:

This thesis is divided into five chapters, with each chapter further divided into its own series of subsections. The current chapter introduces the thesis and provides an outline of the research project. The introduction engages in a short discussion concerning the topic of domestic violence, and some of the issues currently debated by researchers, scholars and academics working in the area. There is some discussion of the controversy surrounding these statistics, and the debate engaged between feminist and men's rights researchers and scholars. Chapter one reveals the motivation for the thesis, and outlines the methods and procedures used to conduct the research. In addition, the introduction explores some of the problems and challenges faced when engaging in this manner of research.

Chapter Two, the Literature Review, is divided into six subsections: The Social Construction of Problems and the Media, Gender and Social Constructionism, Police Reported Domestic Violence in Canada, Victimization Surveys in Canada, Domestic Violence in Feminist and Men's Rights Discourses, and Victims and Batterers in Feminist and Men's Rights Claims-making. The purpose of the overview of the literature is to flesh out the theoretical stance of the thesis, and to examine current research on domestic violence with the objectives of : a) providing descriptive information regarding the phenomena and the effects of domestic violence, b) identifying areas in need of continued investigation, and c) presenting a research study that addresses the current issues, debates and controversies surrounding the topic of domestic violence in the literature.

The first subsection in Chapter Two, “The Social Construction of Problems and the Media”, discusses how problems are socially constructed through a variety of processes, with specific reference to arguments made by both Blumer (1971) and Gusfield (1984). The subsection outlines both Blumer’s and Gusfield’s theories of constructionism, and their stance that knowledge of conditions or “realities” is irrelevant to the study of social problems. Finally, the process of social problems construction is related to men’s rights and feminist discourses on domestic violence, and the issues surrounding it. This discussion leads into the next subsection on the social construction of domestic violence, and the problems with using social constructionism when exploring domestic abuse.

The second subsection of the Literature Review chapter, “Gender and Social Constructionism”, outlines the construction of gender roles, gendered conceptions and appropriate behaviour assigned to men and women in society. Further, the link between studies of domestic violence, which is socially constructed, and social definitions of particular roles for individuals based on gender, is discussed throughout this subsection. The discussion revolves around the issue of media influence through various means, and how feminist and men’s rights advocates view gender, and gender construction. The underlying theme that carries through this chapter is the non-static nature of gender, and changing gender roles, with specific reference to biological versus social aspects as outlined by feminist researcher Heidi Hartmann (2000).

The third subsection “Police Reported Domestic Violence in Canada” examines statistics presented in Statistics Canada reports such as the 1999, 2000 and 2002 Family

Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile reports. This subsection presents statistics gathered through research and presents them in relation to the current research project. This subsection discusses domestic violence and charging rates, as well as weapon use and injuries.

The forth subsection of the chapter, "Victimization Surveys in Canada" explores statistics from various Statistics Canada victimization reports on domestic violence, such as the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey and the 1999 General Social Survey. This victimization survey data is compared to data from official police reported domestic violence as discussed in the previous subsection. Much like the previous subsection, this subsection presents statistics obtained in survey research, and presents them in relation to the current research project. This subsection addresses the level of fear associated with domestic violence, as well as the consequences and impact of domestic violence.

The fifth subsection "Domestic Violence in Feminist and Men's Rights Discourses", focuses upon the issue of domestic abuse as it relates to feminist and men's rights movements, and the work done by both groups to achieve their respective goals. The subsection opens with a discussion of the emergence of domestic violence as a social problem, and activities undertaken by the feminist movement to uncover it. This discussion moves to the legal and social impact, legislative changes and policy making that has occurred due to the feminist movement and their efforts. The subsection outlines the emergence of a counter-movement (men's movement) and men's rights groups' push for recognition. In addition, similarities between the feminist and men's movement are presented. Arguments made by both sides concerning the impact and

consequences of domestic abuse on male victims, as well as the perceived suppression of these victims, are explored throughout this subsection. The issues of the general public's tendency for a gender specific rather than gender neutral view of domestic violence, and the perception of female violence being less serious than male violence is presented in this subsection.

The final subsection of the chapter, "Victims and Batterers in Feminist and Men's Rights Claims-making", provides a definition of domestic violence as extending from physical assault. Further, the subsection addresses the Conflict Tactics Scale, and engages in a brief discussion regarding its pros and cons, as well as critics' arguments against the measure, specifically those of feminist opponents. The most important part of this subsection is the discussion regarding the difficulty in defining batterers and victims. A series of problems with various definitions is explored and discussed, with little reconciliation made.

Chapter Three, Methodology, contains four subsections: Content Analysis, Measures, Procedure, and Problems: Issues for Conducting Research. The first subsection of chapter three, "Content Analysis", describes and outlines the research method content analysis. This section provides a definition of content analysis, and what constitutes "content", and includes a discussion of the techniques utilized within the research method. As well, included here is the reasoning behind the use of content analysis for the current research project, and why this method is employed. Procedures and measures are mentioned in relation to methods used in the current research project in this subsection, but only briefly since both are discussed in greater detail later in the

chapter. There is reference to arguments made regarding content analysis by both Holsti (1968) and Neuman (2000), and the presentation of criticisms levelled against the technique, including the issue of how content analysis can be inaccurately used to discover, or justify false, or subjective, claims or shoddy research.

The second subsection, "Measures", discusses the various measures used in the thesis, including the unit of analysis, the population and the sampling strategy. Each measure is defined and discussed in this subsection, with examples from the research project provided. In addition, parameters for articles included as a unit of analysis in the research project are outlined in detail, with explanations as to why these parameters were established. Further, justification as to why certain articles were eliminated and/or excluded is provided and discussed, with particular attention given to possible error(s) made in the implementation of the parameters.

The third subsection of Chapter Three, "Procedure", outlines the process used for this thesis. This subsection examines the issues surrounding domestic violence, and the exploration of the topic through the use of latent and manifest coding methods. This subsection defines both latent and manifest coding and outlines the general "rules" associated with each coding method. There is a discussion of how latent and manifest coding relates to, and is useful for, the current research project and its method of exploration. Further, the utilization of a coding system keeping in line with latent and manifest coding methods and "rules" that include "characteristics of the article", is defined in detail in this subsection. There is also a discussion of the reliability and validity of both latent and manifest coding methods. This discussion includes why each

coding method is more or less reliable than the other, and how these differences impact research methods, and the research itself.

The final paragraph of the subsection summarizes why certain articles from the two newspapers examined for this research project are used, while other articles are eliminated. The parameters for inclusion of newspaper articles is outlined earlier in this chapter under the subsection entitled “Measures”, and is briefly revisited in this subsection. Included in this discussion is the results of using latent and manifest coding methods to establish a body of research - the number of articles produced during the search, the number of articles produced by each newspaper, and the number of articles that were relevant and usable for the project.

The final subsection of Chapter Three, “Problems: Issues for Conducting Research”, outlines the various issues involved in executing research, with a particular focus on the validity and reliability of the information provided. Since content analysis was utilized for this thesis the discussion of validity, reliability and ethics revolves around this research method. Included in this subsection is an explanation as to why content analysis is employed rather than another research method. Various aspects of how other research methods impact the current project are discussed. Attention to subjectivity and objectivity is given in this segment. Problems with both are explored and methods of recognition are presented. In addition, issues of biases are presented and explored, with techniques to identify and minimize their “interference” in research.

Chapter Four, “Findings”, is divided into seven subsections: Working Hypothesis, The Toronto Star Versus the Toronto Sun, Headlines, Article Content, Language

Utilized in the Articles, National Versus Local Coverage, and Findings Summary.

After discussing the working hypothesis, the second subsection of Chapter Four is “The Toronto Star Versus the Toronto Sun”. This section discusses the newsprint media sources utilized for this research project, the Star, and the Sun, and their coverage of domestic violence and its issues. The subsection begins with a brief introduction and moves into a discussion of the “intrinsic nature” of the articles in the two newspapers. The issue of each newspaper’s reliance upon similar government agencies, departments and offices as sources on domestic violence, and how this impacts the writing of the articles, regardless of the newspaper’s political orientation, is explored. In addition, the issue of “spouting” political rhetoric, and its relevance to the composition and reporting of an article is examined. The remainder of this subsection deals with the analysis of the articles studied for the current research project. The distribution of articles between the two newspapers, with particular attention paid to the content of the articles, is explored and discussed throughout this portion of the subsection. The articles are examined in terms of focus, whether it be upon legislation/policy making/funding issues etc., or specific incidents of domestic violence. In addition, special attention is given to the gender composition of the various individuals reported in the articles, and whether the article was “female-oriented” or “male-oriented”. These findings are presented in numbers and percentages. These statistics are then analysed and compared, within the newspaper and between newspapers. Further, the statistics, or number of articles presented in each newspaper, are compared to the National statistics from Statistics Canada.

The subsection “Headlines” outlines and analyses the content of the various article headlines studied for this research project. It explores the language used to convey messages in the headlines of articles published in both newspapers, and discusses the importance of the headline content to attract readers. Headlines are not only important for “grabbing” the attention of the reader, but for conveying a wealth of information in a limited space. In addition, headlines influence the opinion of the reader *before* he/she reads the article.

The subsection, “Article Content” examines the text of the articles for themes and patterns concerning domestic violence present in the Star and the Sun. Exploration of the content of the articles in the newspapers is important for understanding how domestic violence and gender are presented and reported on in the newsprint media. The subsection stresses this point and pays close attention to certain aspects of content present in the articles, such as presentation of the topic, language content (wording and/or phrasing), coverage devoted to women and/or women’s issues versus coverage devoted to men and/or men’s issues, and format. In addition, this subsection presents a thorough discussion of the similarities and differences between female-oriented articles, and male-oriented articles, with specific focus upon how the two newspapers report findings of domestic violence.

The subsection “Language Utilized in the Articles” is an extension of the previous subsection. This subsection, much like the prior subsection, deals with the content of the articles published in both the Star, and the Sun. However, this subsection focuses primarily on the language employed by the journalists in the articles, and

includes a deeper analysis of such language. This subsection analyses terms and phrases utilized in the various articles examined for this project and how these terms and phrases are used to convey meaning, and communicate information about domestic violence, its victims, offenders and the issues involved. In addition, this subsection investigates how numerous words and phrases are linked together in order to form paragraphs, and ultimately articles, thus relaying data concerning domestic violence with particular emphasis upon gender. This subsection also discusses the importance of recognizing that language can be employed in numerous ways to convey various meanings, and that intended messages are different from perceived messages.

The subsection “National Versus Local Coverage”, explores the newsprint media’s coverage of domestic violence issues, incidents, victims and offenders in relation to national and local status. This subsection begins with the presentation of the number of articles that appear in both the Star and the Sun that are devoted to national stories/coverage and local stories/coverage. These findings are presented in both raw numbers and percentages. Various explanations for the difference in the volume of national versus local articles published in each newspaper are presented and explored. In addition, motivations for publishing nationally-oriented articles as opposed to locally-oriented ones are illustrated and scrutinized. Following this discussion, the subsection engages in a debate regarding the relevance of national and local coverage to the issue of gender construction and domestic violence within the newsprint media. Here, issues of the seriousness of the violence and/or injury, the likelihood of further coverage, demographics and the geographic placement of the assault are discussed and examined

for their impact on the newspapers' amount of coverage.

The final subsection of Chapter Four, "Findings Summary", is self-explanatory. This subsection provides closure for the Findings chapter, and draws conclusions from the material presented in the four previous subsections. Domestic violence and the issues surrounding the topic are revisited in this subsection, and presented in relation to the findings of the current research project. As noted throughout the thesis, gender construction is a hotly debated issue with reference to domestic violence and the newsprint media. This subsection continues the discussion presented through this chapter on the ways gender is constructed through domestic violence coverage in the newsprint media.

The fifth, and final, chapter of this thesis, "Conclusions" is the only chapter not divided into subsections. This chapter is a reflection upon the findings discussed throughout the research project and revisits much of the material presented within. This chapter not only recognizes the limitations of the information presented in the articles published in both the Star and the Sun, but also the benefits of this information. This final chapter also includes a summary of the thesis itself. The purpose of the synopsis is to provide an overview of the research project, as well as present a conclusion to the thesis, as the title of the chapter indicates.

Literature Review - Chapter Two

The Social Construction of Problems and the Media:

[Social] Constructionists characteristically “focus attention on inter-subjective or definitional practices - that is how conditions, prior to their emergence into public awareness as a social problem, acquire recognition, achieve legitimization, undergo mobilization of action, and become institutionalized or co-opted through the drawing up and implementation of official, as well as, competing plans of action”(Mann 2000:6).

The above quote summarizes a social constructionist's perspective on the career of a social problem, first formulated by Herbert Blumer in “Social Problems as Collective Behaviour”. Blumer argues that social problems are a product of collective definitions, not a set of objective social arrangements with an intrinsic make-up (Blumer 1971). Blumer contends that issues go through a series of “steps” before they emerge as social problems. First, the issue must be brought forth within society. Blumer argues that the emergence of an issue as a social problem is a highly selective process involving the legitimization of the issue through support or social endorsement, and the acquisition of respectability (Blumer 1971). As the issue becomes concrete and is discussed, controversy and diverse claims emerge. Blumer contends that this “mobilization of action” is fuelled by exaggerated claims and distorted depictions (Blumer 1971). “Discussion, advocacy, evaluation, falsification, diversionary tactics, and advancing of proposals take place in the media of communication, in casual meetings, organized meetings, legislative chambers, and committee hearings. All this constitutes a mobilization of the society for action on the social problem” (Blumer 1971:304).

Following this mobilization of action, Blumer points out that an official plan of action is formulated in order to accommodate diverse views and opinions, while protecting vested interests. This entails a series of compromises, concessions, tradeoffs, and deference to power while judgments are made on what might be a workable plan of action. This defining and redefining process results in the construction of an official definition of the problem, as for example, the official definition of domestic violence as “violence against women” (Tierney 1982; Dobash and Dobash 1988, 1992, 1998; DeKeseredy and Hinch 1991; Mann 2000). Finally, Blumer argues, the implementation of the official plan occurs. This implementation ushers in a new process of the collective definition, in that people who stand to lose from this definition and plan, struggle to obstruct or bend the plan, as in the case of men’s rights activists (Farrell 1993; Miller and Sharif 1995; Pearson 1997; Bala 1999; Tutty 1999).

“Strict” constructionists, as opposed to “weak” or “contextual” constructionists, argue that knowledge of conditions or “realities” is irrelevant to the study of social problems, and that attempts to develop knowledge of conditions impede analysis of “social problems processes since knowledge of the “indisputable character” of a problem is unattainable, beyond the grasp of human subjects” (Gusfield 1984: 23). Gusfield is asserting that any attempt at understanding social problems independently of their constructions is futile since we cannot uncover the undeniable truth of a problem since we “create” the truth in human terms. We can, however, widen understandings by revealing alternatives from which to make choices and interpret events (Gusfield 1984; Best 1993). Strict constructionists insist, however, that the “viability” of a definition or

intervention strategy hinges solely on the extent to which it is adopted by institutions, and individuals in society, and that this has little or nothing to do with the extent to which it corresponds with alleged conditions (Schneider 1993). In other words, it does not matter if a particular group is right, only if their definition prevails.

As socially constructed, the representation of domestic abuse is a system for categorizing violence, and for morally evaluating it. The battered woman is a representation for a woman “with a particular type of experience, biography, motivation and subjectivity” (Loseke 1992:10). Thus, to social constructionists, domestic abuse is a collective representation, a “construction” of an experience, and the categories victim, perpetrator, and survivor are likewise constructions of the “roles” that women and men who experience domestic violence occupy.

Social constructionism is not without its problems when exploring the issue of domestic abuse, however. Critics argue that a position that views social problems as “constructed” rather than as substantive has to either admit that there is an independent reality other than constructionism, or to view research as a hopeless exercise since the researcher finds what he/she “wants” to find (Schneider 1993; Best 1993). Weak constructionist Joel Best (1993) maintains that social constructionists need not claim there is no “truth” to experiences, or that these experiences are not “real”. Rather, the “truth” experienced is framed in a reality that is “constructed”, and is unavoidably mediated through discourses that are moulded by politics and other social processes (Mann 2000). In other words, the event is “real” in the sense that it is experienced, but this experience is nonetheless anchored within a “constructed” reality.

From the perspective of contextual constructionism, what can and is known about a phenomenon around which competing claims are advanced is not unimportant. Indeed, what can and is known about domestic violence - through official statistics, victimization studies, and the like - is highly relevant, because this “evidence” is subject to competing interpretations. Indeed, the two most salient features of the context framing this analysis are official and survey evidence on domestic violence, and feminist and men’s rights groups competing interpretations of this evidence.

Finally, the media itself is an important player, as well as a site for claims-making activity. The media, and the news media in particular, are purveyors of information, and mediums for sensationalizing and mobilizing public sentiment around social problems (Reiner 2002). The media reports on official statistics, social research, and actual day to day incidents of domestic violence which come to the attention of the police, and are deemed newsworthy by virtue of their seriousness, or due to some other exceptional feature of the occurrence (Reiner 2002). The media also reports on activists’ activities. Social constructionism provides guidance in analysing these accounts. Specifically, social constructionism allows for a critical, intensive examination of domestic violence discourses, in which male victims and female perpetrators are featured. It also allows for a reflexive in-depth analysis of the role the media plays in claims-making activities, in which, and through which, domestic violence and gender are constructed.

The media sources that I draw upon are two Toronto area newspapers over a ten year period ending December 31, 2000 (the Toronto Star, and the Toronto Sun). During this time period, men’s rights groups were struggling to gain the attention of the

Canadian public, and policy makers, with the explicit goal of having the problem of “battered husbands” officially recognized (Bala 1999; Tutty 1999).

Gender and Social Constructionism:

The preceding discussion of social problems as a “construction” applies to gender. From a social constructionist perspective, gender is a product of collective definitions; it is not an objective or essential aspect or component of human beings. As theorized by West and Zimmerman (1987), and as reformulated by West and Fenstermaker (1995), and numerous theorists drawing upon their work (see for example Tutty 1999), this construction views gender not as “a set of traits”, “a variable” or “a role”, but rather the product of “social doings”. Men “do” gender in one fashion, while women “do” gender in another. “Doing gender” consists of managing occasions where gender must be “finely fitted to situations and modified or transformed as the occasion demands, so that whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen in context as gender-appropriate or gender-inappropriate” (West and Zimmerman 1987:135).

The general cultural perspective in Western societies sees women and men as “naturally and unequivocally defined categories of being, with distinctive psychological and behavioural propensities that can be predicted from their reproductive functions” (West and Zimmerman 1987:128). These differences between the male and female species are “supported” by the division of labour between the genders in society, and by a differentiation of feminine and masculine attitudes and behaviours. These differentiations are perceived to be natural and rooted in biology. Femininity and

masculinity are basic characterizations of individuals in society (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, West and Zimmerman argue that gender is created through interaction, while at the same time structuring interaction. Individuals act and react in socially structured circumstances based on gender including conceptions of femininity and masculinity. This achievement is what West and Zimmerman refer to as “accomplishment of gender” (1987:131).

Gender theorists point out that in Western society the construction of gender roles in society emphasizes a division between the sexes (see for example Arias et al. 1986; West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995). Every aspect of social life is subject to gender norms, which help script appropriate behaviour and characteristics. These “constructed” genderized conceptions and practices impact upon the way in which individual women and men act, and further influence the ways the self and others’ view these actions in various situations, including domestic violence (Messerschmidt 1993, 2000). Domestic violence is thus, at least theoretically, a “site” through which, and in which, women and men both “do gender” (Mann 2003; see also Messerschmidt 1993, 2000).

As West and Zimmerman’s (1987) discussion makes clear, gender is not static. The gender identities of individuals are constantly being produced, reproduced and transformed. They are not based solely upon gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, certain behaviours are widely considered unacceptable, or some maintain even unbelievable for women (see for example Pearson 1997; see also Arias et al. 1986). Individuals are expected to conform to gender expectations, and deviations from the norm are typically,

if naively, considered “unnatural” (Burgess 1984).

While the claim that women are never violent is not one advanced in contemporary feminist discourse (Dobash and Dobash 1998; DeKeseredy 1999; Mann 2000, 2003; Berns 2001), or Canadian policy papers (Tutty 1999), the prevailing image of a domestic violence perpetrator is still that of a male.

It is reasonable to assume that the media perpetuates this image through commercials, television programs, printed advertisements and articles aimed at raising public awareness of domestic violence, or simply at selling (Reiner 2002) papers or products. Many of these media images of domestic violence depict men and women in traditional, gender specific roles, with domestic and work tasks divided accordingly. Such media portrayals suggest that individuals who transcend or reverse stereotypical gender roles, are “different”, “strange”, “uncooperative”, or “abnormal” (see discussion of the media and gender by Cavender et al. 1999).

As do many commentators on the sex/gender divide, Heidi Hartmann (2000), a feminist writer, argues that individuals are born anatomically male or female, biological sexes, “but we are created woman, and man, socially recognized genders” (2000:323). Hartmann argues that a central aspect in defining gender across cultures has been a differentiation between strong and weak, powerful and powerless. Not only has this given the perception that men are stronger and should rule over women, it has implied that women are incapable of overpowering or acting out violently toward men. The media is one cultural site in which this dichotomous view of the sexes is reproduced.

In fact, violent women have long been recognized in Western culture. Indeed,

men who are subject to violence by women have traditionally been the subject not of disbelief, but of ridicule. Thus, while some commentators claim that the very idea of men being beaten by their female partners runs contrary to many deeply entrenched beliefs about men and women (see for example Pearson 1997), public recognition of female violence against men is a well-documented phenomenon (Lucca and Steinmetz 1998; Miller and Sharif 1995; Steinmetz 1977).

Steinmetz (1977-1978), among others, has argued that “battered men” command not sympathy, but derision, evidenced in the Andy Capp cartoon image of a woman chasing her husband with a frying pan. In 18th and 19th century France this derision was institutionalized in a public ritual, in which a husband who had been physically assaulted or beaten by his wife was forced by the community to wear women’s clothing and ride backwards around the village on a donkey, holding its tail (Lucca and Steinmetz 1988).

The following review situates the contested terrain of domestic violence in feminist and men’s rights discourse. Men’s rights and feminist claims making draws upon expert claims and bodies of evidence. The dominant position in Canada is to draw upon primarily police reports for information and statistics about domestic violence. This is consistent with feminist definitions of domestic violence.

Police Reported Domestic Violence in Canada:

A contextual constructionist analysis seeks to capture salient aspects of the context in which claims making occurs, including official counts on the phenomenon (Best 1993). As reported by Statistics Canada (Fitzgerald 1999), 17% of all assault charges in Canada

were for domestic assault in 1997. Of these, women were victims at eight times the rate of men. In cases of domestic violence with a female victim, charges were laid against men in 88% of the cases (Fitzgerald 1999:11). In contrast, 67% of cases with a male victim resulted in a police charge (Fitzgerald 1999:15).

Police reported domestic violence charge rates reported in Statistics Canada's 2000 profile of family violence show similar patterns (Bunge 2000). Eighty seven percent of spousal violence victims in 1999 were female. In the 2000 report, 18% of all assault charges were for domestic assault, and women were victims at six times the rate of men (Bunge 2000:23). However, consistent with the 1997 pattern discussed above, 62% of cases with a male victim resulted in a police charge compared to 81% with a female victim (Bunge 2000:24). These charge patterns show that women were only slightly more likely to be charged when an assault came to the attention of the police in 1997 than in 1999. There is no real change in the overall pattern.

At the time of the 2002 family violence update (Trainor 2002), police reported rates of domestic violence charges had not changed significantly. Eighty five percent of spousal victims in 2001 were female. As reported by Statistics Canada (Trainor 2002), 18% of all assault charges in Canada were for domestic assault in 2001 (Trainor 2002:7). Again, consistent with the findings of both the 1997 and 1999 patterns, in cases of domestic violence with a female victim, charges were laid against men in 84% of the cases, while 69% of cases with a male victim resulted in a police charge (Trainor 2002:8). There has only been a small increase in charges laid in domestic violence cases involving male victims, over the past few years. This increase is not statistically

significant, as rates fluctuate from year to year.

In police reported domestic violence 53% of victimized women used violence compared to 42% of victimized men (Bunge 2000:21), suggesting that victimized women are more likely to use defensive, or retaliatory violence than are men. Of every 100 cases of domestic violence reported, 13 males and 87 females were victims of assault. Of these, 2.6 males, or 20% were assaulted with a weapon, while 9.6, or 11% of females were assaulted with a weapon. This means men were proportionately more likely to be the victims of assault with a weapon causing bodily harm and aggravated assault. (Bunge 2000:22). According to police statistics, this is because, at least in part, "female aggressors are more likely to rely on weapons when committing spousal assault while males are more likely to rely on physical force" (Bunge 2000:22). However, when men were victims of domestic violence involving a weapon, they were less likely to be injured - 13% of men compared to 40% of women. This suggests, therefore, that women may be using weapons for the purposes of threatening their spouse which results in police laying more serious charges (Bunge 2000:22).

Spousal homicide accounts for a substantial proportion of all homicides in Canada (Bunge 2000). Statistics Canada reports on homicide from 1990 to 1998 show that spouses represented 15% of all victims of solved homicides, and 49% of family-related incidents (Bunge 2000:40). Over the ten year period extending from 1990 to 1999, women were killed by their spouses at three times the rate of men (Bunge 2000:40). Despite these numbers, Statistics Canada's family violence profiles from 1990 to 2000 show a small, but consistent decrease in the number of spousal homicide

charges in Canada (Bunge 2000). However, the spousal homicide rate for 2001 increased in Canada for the first time in six years (Canadian Press 2002). The number of men accused of killing their current or former wives rose from 52 in 2000, to 69 in 2001 (Canadian Press 2002). This increase in the spousal homicide rate for 2001 is due to exceptional numbers of women killed by male partners in Ontario.

The percentages of all domestic assaults for each sex that result in serious injury or death are similar, far more domestic assaults are against women (85% in 2001; 87% in 1999; 88% in 1997). In addition, women were more likely to sustain a physical injury, 40% of victimized women compared to 13% of victimized men, with 15% of these women requiring medical attention (Bunge 2000:22). Further, women are murdered by spouses at a far higher rate than are men (Bunge 2000:39-41).

Victimization Surveys in Canada:

Statistics Canada began conducting victimization surveys that addressed domestic violence in 1993, initially measuring only domestic violence victimization reported by women (Statistics Canada, Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division 1993). The 1999 General Social Survey (Silver 1999), which measures domestic violence victimization for both women and men, found rates of domestic violence against women to be declining. In the 1993 study, 12% of women reported being assaulted by a spouse or ex-spouse in the five-year period prior to the survey. In 1999 only 8% of women reported violence at the hands of a spouse or ex-spouse, a drop which Statistics Canada researchers describe as statistically significant (see also discussion in Bunge 2000).

The 1999 General Social Survey (Silver 1999) also found, however, that although women more commonly experienced such acts as economic deprivation, sexual abuse, intimidation, isolation, stalking and terrorizing, some men reported experiencing such acts as well (Silver 1999). According to the 1999 study, 28% of women and 22% of men experienced some type of violence by an ex-partner (Bunge 2000:8), and 77% of women and 32% of men experienced some form of criminal harassment after they separated from a violent partner (Bunge 2000:10). Further, 85% of women and 78% of men reported negative emotional consequences as a result of domestic abuse (Bunge 2000:10). Thirty eight percent of victimized women feared for their life during a domestic violence incident versus 7% of victimized men (Bunge 2000:18). In addition, 34% of victimized women and 3% of victimized men reported generalized fearfulness as a consequence of violence that had taken place over the preceding five year reporting period.

These statistics are relevant to my study as they have often been cited by various groups in support of, and opposition to, positions on domestic abuse and its victims. Organizations who support the "women are violent too" position, such as Men Supporting Men Inc., rely heavily on survey (victimization) data which suggests overall rates of perpetration are similar for women and men. Groups that support the "the men are the primary perpetrators" position rely more on official statistics, and on data from victimization surveys that reveal injury, fear, economic deprivation, and other aspects of "battering" as defined in this body of research (e.g. Tjaden and Thoennes 2000; Ferraro 2001; Swan and Snow 2002).

These findings put into perspective the popular attitude that female violence is less serious. They help explain why the problem of battered men, or battered husbands (Tutty 1999) has not emerged as a social problem in the same way the battered woman has.

Domestic Violence in Feminist and Men's Rights Discourses:

The issue of domestic abuse emerged as a social problem (Blumer 1971) due to the activities of the feminist women's movement in the 1970s (Tierney 1982). Within a short time, women's groups were established, and they campaigned to open shelters. These groups pressured authorities, sought funds, and used the mass media in their effort to assist battered women (Dobash and Dobash 1988). As described by feminist academics and battered women activists (Walker 1979; Schechter 1988; Dobash and Dobash 1988, 1992, 1998; Yllo 1993), the growing awareness of domestic violence lent a voice to women in need of one. The plight of battered women came to be recognized as a significant social problem, which led to changes in housing, social services and legal spheres of activity. This followed upon years of efforts by women's groups to bring the issue into the centre of social policy - specifically years of lobbying, testifying and writing grants in order to further this cause. Women's groups relied "heavily on educational forums, public hearings, [and] radio and television to re-conceptualize the issue and explain its parameters, stressing that woman abuse is a community responsibility rather than an interpersonal problem" (Schechter 1988:303). In time, larger feminist networks, and national meetings "provided the settings in which women

found one another, and created a national battered women's movement" (Schechter 1988:301). These efforts led to the formation of shelters, and the establishment of mandatory charge practices, domestic violence courts, and male batterer programs (Dobash and Dobash 1998; Ferraro 2001).

As with many large scale social movements, a significant counter-movement has developed in response - the men's movement (McCaffrey and Keys 2000). In Canada, and in North America generally, this counter-movement or "backlash" (Faludi 1991; DeKeseredy 1999) is associated with the push for recognition by men's rights groups such as the Men's Educational Support Association and Men Supporting Men Inc. (Justice Canada 1998). Their activity is leading Canadian researchers and policy makers to acknowledge male victims of domestic violence, and whether social policy should be adapted to address their needs (Bala 1999; Tutty 1999).

As described by academics Williams and Williams (1995), the men's rights movement has its roots in feminism (see also Messner 1998). Williams and Williams observe that the men's rights movement draws on liberal feminist "gender equality" and "equal rights" frameworks. Academic commentators agree that the men's rights movement is an outgrowth of what was initially a pro-feminist men's liberation movement, and that men's rights appropriated "rights" claims from liberal feminist discourse (Williams and Williams 1995; Messner 1998). This appropriation of "rights" claims is evident in discourses such as father's rights, and men's rights discourses that utilize sex role arguments to promote "equality" claims, and advance gender neutral arguments. Men's rights discourse, in its attempt to advance "equality" claims regarding

men's rights to custody, has co-opted the liberal feminist rhetoric of gender "equality" and "rights" to launch a campaign designed to alter laws related to divorce and child custody (Messner 1998). Men's rights discourse is critical of the ways in which masculinity has "entrapped, limited and harmed men" (Messner 1998:268). Men's liberation advocates want to reconstruct a masculinity that is more "healthful, peaceful and nurturing" (Messner 1998:268). Advocates claim that while stereotypes are limiting and oppressive to both men and women, continued imposition of a rigidly narrow male sex role results primarily in costs to men (see Messner 1998).

In the early 1970s, men who sought to "break out of traditional male roles and experience personal growth began to form local groups" (Williams and Williams 1995:192). However, by the late 1970s, a different type of men's group was forming, one largely composed of men who argued that the "remedy for men's problems was a more straightforwardly political and involved legal change" (Williams and Williams 1995:192). These men's groups argued that feminism did not include men's liberation, or rights. The liberation was unilateral for women, and was not "human liberation" as some men's rights activists had hoped; feminism did not address men's oppression (see Messner 1998). These men's groups lobby for the rights of men - for fair representation in divorce proceedings, protection under the law from false allegations of spousal or child physical/sexual abuse, custody rights and enforcement of visitation orders - as in hearings, held across Canada, of the Parliamentary Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access in 1998 (Bala 1999). Men's advocate Warren Farrell (1993) argues, these men's groups affirm positive values of masculinity, while challenging popular

stereotypes of males as an inherently corrupt oppressor class.

Williams and Williams (1995) state that men's rights advocates regard their work as beneficial in aiding men in their struggle against discrimination and injustices. Many of these groups find the labels "backlash against feminism" and "antifeminist backlash" (Faludi 1991; DeKeseredy 1999) offensive. Men's groups and activists argue that the term "backlash" implies that the men's rights movement is rooted in efforts to wreck "revenge" against feminism. Further, men's rights activists describe their reaction to the feminist constructions of domestic abuse as a positive step toward aiding *all* victims of abuse, by drawing attention away from strictly women centred definitions and moving toward gender neutral explanations. However, there are some men's rights groups in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, such as Angry Harry, The National Coalition of Free Men, Masculinism, Domain of Patriarchy and Manorama, that are adamantly anti-feminist, and proudly proclaim that they use the same rhetoric as do radical feminists against radical feminists (<http://www.freewebs.com/anitfeminist/index.htm>).

While both feminist activists and men's rights activists maintain that domestic abuse should not be tolerated, there has been disagreement over whether men actually experience this sort of victimization (Dobash and Dobash 1978). Feminist scholars and activists such as Dobash and Dobash (1992, 1998), Yllo (1993), Comack (1999) and Ferraro (2001) concede that such abuse can indeed occur, on a relatively small scale. However, critics such as Pearson (1997) contend that some radical feminists and women's advocates argue that men are the aggressors in any relationship, and it is not

possible for them to be victims of domestic assault. The following quote exemplifies mainstream feminist thought on the issue in the early 1990s:

“Violence against women in the home is a critical component of the system of male power. Violence grows out of inequality within marriage (and other intimate relationships that are modelled on marriage) and reinforces male dominance and female subordination within the home and outside it. Violence against women is a tactic of male control. It is not gender neutral any more than the economic division of labour or the institution of marriage is gender neutral”(Yllo 1993:54).

It is noteworthy that Yllo (1993), who is hardly a “radical” feminist, does not address the possibility that women’s violence against men is largely defensive or retaliatory, as Tutty’s (1999) review of recent research suggests is commonly the case. As Mann (2003) argues, the “fact” that women and men both perpetrate violent acts does not mean that violence is “gender neutral”. Indeed, men and women perpetrate and experience violence in a different manner. The experiences, consequences and meanings attributed to domestic violence differ for men and women. The horrifying male-to-female abuse reported in studies of women’s shelters, hospitals, and other clinical settings, differs from the minor physical incidents of female-to-male abuse, as reported in social surveys (see discussion by Mann 2003).

As previously discussed, soon after wife battery was “discovered” by feminists activists, family violence researchers “found” that both men and women perpetrate minor and severe acts of domestic assault (Steinmetz 1977-1978; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1980). This finding is derived from the first National Family Violence Survey, conducted in the United States in 1975, and has been replicated in numerous studies

since including Canada's 1999 General Social Survey (Bunge 2000). As Tutty (1999) notes, men's rights activists draw upon this body of work to advance their argument that women can be as violent as men, and that violence by women is equally serious, an argument that Straus also advances, though with qualifications (1993, 1997, 1999).

Victims and Batterers in Feminist and Men's Rights Claims-making:

From a social constructionist perspective, disagreement concerning the salience of male domestic victimization is due to how contending constructions of the phenomenon of domestic abuse, and therefore the categories victim and batterer.

As discussed above, feminist definitions of "battering" focus on coercive control and denigration, and are not restricted to physical assaults or acts resulting in physical harm (Kurz 1993; Johnson 1995; Dobash and Dobash 1998; Ferraro 2001). In this discourse, physical assault does not have to be present in order for an individual to be defined as a battering victim. Rather, battering consists of emotional, sexual and physical acts that entail or elicit dread, fear and terror. These researchers are highly critical of measures or constructs of domestic violence that rely on Murray Straus' (1993) Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). Feminist critics of the CTS argue that this instrument erroneously assumes that violence lies at the end of a continuum that begins with "discussed an issue calmly" and escalates to "cried", "stomped out", and so on through assaults with weapons.

According to feminist critics, physical battering can occur independent of conflict, and emotional battering can occur independent of physical assault (Dobash and

Dobash 1998; Gottman and Jacobson 1998; Ferraro 2001). CTS critics further argue that this measure does not assess the meanings, contexts, or consequences of acts, and that it excludes information on economic deprivation, sexual abuse, intimidation, isolation, stalking, and terrorizing - all common elements of battering that are rarely perpetrated by woman (Yllo 1993; Dobash and Dobash 1992, 1998; Tutty 1999; Ferraro 2001).

Murray Straus and Richard Gelles developed the CTS to measure acts of aggression between or against family members, including spouses, children and siblings (Straus 1993). The CTS is designed to measure conflict "tactics" in three general categories: 1) reasoning, which includes rational discussion; 2) verbal aggression, which involves verbal or nonverbal acts that "symbolically hurt the other"; and 3) violence, which is the use of physical aggression (Gelles and Straus 1986). As defined in Gelles' and Straus' family violence discourse, battering relationships are those in which violence, especially severe violence, occurs regularly or repeatedly. Yllo (1993) argues that in Straus' theoretical discussion of the CTS "he explores several dimensions of the concept of conflict, but never mentions violence or explains why violence is best conceptualized as a conflict tactic" (Yllo 1993:52). In response, Straus (1993, 1997, 1999) argues that the CTS does validly measure multiple aspects of violence and conflict. Straus further argues that no matter what one thinks of the CTS, at least four studies that do not use the CTS also found roughly equal rates of violence by women (Straus 1993, 1997, 1999), as has the recent Statistics Canada General Social Survey which uses a modified version of this instrument (Trainor 2002). Central to these debates is the issue of control, as numerous commentators have noted (see review by Tutty

1999).

From a men's rights perspective, however, the implicit and often explicit, feminist argument that control is gendered is problematic, and counterproductive. If battering is conceptualized as a tactic of control by the party who wishes to forcefully maintain or obtain control in a relationship, then women can also be batterers, as men's rights sympathizer Pearson (1997) forcefully argues, and many feminists acknowledge (see review by Tutty 1999).

The issue of conflict versus control aside, Straus (1993) defines a "batterer" as an individual who consistently engages in physical aggression toward another individual with whom they have an intimate relationship. That is, for Straus, a victim of domestic violence is an individual who is on the receiving end of consistent physical aggression, and this is something that can be measured empirically (Straus 1993). He argues, drawing on U.S. patterns, that rising trends in arrest and charge rates prove that men and women engage in domestic violence on a relatively equal scale, and that police and courts are finally taking notice (Straus 1993). Feminist critics of the CTS contend that this is not the case. Some argue that now that more jurisdictions require police officers to make an arrest when answering a domestic violence call, more women who may have struck a male in self-defence are being arrested (Loseke 1992; Snider 1995; Tutty 1999). Thus the law designed to protect women may now be actually hurting women by further victimizing them - though, as the review of official domestic violence rates above demonstrates, the trend toward charging more women is not evident in Canada. When the discussion shifts to domestic homicide, the principle victims are clearly women,

especially in Canada.

While both feminist and family violence researchers unambiguously address the harm of patterned violence or abuse, neither solves problems associated with defining who is a batterer and who is a victim when both partners engage in violence, as is the case with mutual combat (Straus 1993; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). In some constructions or "accounts" (Straus 1993; Dobash and Dobash 1998; Mann 2000), the line between batterer and victim appears blurred. The same occurs regarding the severity of the abuse: how severe does an assault have to be in order for the individual who is assaulted or abused to be categorized as a victim of battering? How many times must a physical or emotional act take place to count as battering -- can a single serious physical assault count, or does someone have to be beaten up repeatedly before she or he is battered? Finally, can violence that is perpetrated in self-defence count as battering? Does a victim who chooses to remain in a relationship knowing that there will be repeated bouts of violence in which she or he is likely to reciprocate slip into the role of a batterer?

Survey research suggests that the general public tend to support a gender specific rather than a gender neutral portrait of domestic violence, evidenced by the majority of surveyed people who endorse the notion that domestic violence is not a problem for men, or at least that it is not as much of a problem for men (Lucca and Steinmetz 1988; Mann 2000). Straus observes (1993), and Lucca and Steinmetz (1988) also argue that North Americans have been socialized to view women's violence as somehow less serious, and consequently more acceptable than men's violence. According to Jane Garcia, a

journalist sympathetic to the men's rights movement, a 1989 study published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* reported that both men and women evaluated female violence less negatively than male violence (Garcia 1991). When it comes to domestic violence the researchers found that physical violence of any kind was perceived less negatively when the female was the aggressor (Garcia 1991).

As Gottman and Jacobson (1998) observed, a major reason that the general public views violence by women as less serious is that women are generally not seen as strong enough to inflict "meaningful" bodily harm. More recently, researcher Michael Johnson (cited in Swan and Snow 2002) theorized a "typology" of women's use of violence in intimate relationships. In Swan and Snow's "test" of this typology, "battering" of male partners emerges as a fraction of female perpetration. As is typical in feminist discussions of this issue, battering is defined as a continuous pattern of physical, sexual and emotional conduct, intentions and self-perceptions centred on and resulting in the control, denigration and terrorism of an intimate partner (see also Kurz 1993; Gottman and Jacobson 1998; Ferraro 2001). It is noteworthy that this typology is consistent with Statistics Canada findings (Bunge 2000) that women suffer significantly greater injury than do men, and that women experience significantly more fear, discussed above. These experiential features of domestic violence, replicated in recent studies conducted in the U.S. and the U.K., as well as in Canada (see review in Bunge 2000; see also Mann's review 2003) suggest that gender norms that define or "construct" female violence as less serious have empirical basis.

Lucca and Steinmetz (1988) and other men's rights proponents, argue, however,

that there are serious consequences to constructions of domestic violence as predominately male perpetrated. First, as Straus states (1993), women are subtly encouraged to be more violent. Little boys are taught never to hit a girl. When they grow up, they are told that any man who hits a woman is a bully. As stated by Lucca and Steinmetz (1988:235), if a woman hits a man, he is to "take it like a man". Lucca and Steinmetz maintain that pictures of women kicking, punching and slapping men with complete impunity are not only widespread in media images, but that people's reactions to such violence is usually "good for her" (1988:235).

In this study, domestic violence refers to acts or events defined as such in the media. My analysis focuses on the ways gender is constructed in media accounts of domestic violence over the 1990s. Feminist and men's rights activists' perspectives and definitions on this issue come into play when the media reports on, or refers to their activity. On the other hand, it is anticipated that accounts of domestic violence in the news media will reinforce feminist perspectives that focus on serious injury and control of female partners.

As the above review demonstrates, domestic violence and the relevance of gender to this "problem" is a contested terrain. Both feminist and men's rights advocates draw upon expert claims to advance their argument on the relevance or irrelevance of gender to victimization, but they are not equally successful. In Canada, the dominant position advanced in social policy draws upon police or criminal justice measures of domestic violence. These measures are based on the numbers of charges that police lay against male and female domestic violence and domestic homicide perpetrators or suspects each

year. The failed attempt by men's rights activists to construct male domestic violence victimization as a social problem equal to female domestic violence victimization is not because there are no male victims. Nor, as the findings of this study demonstrate, do media practices and bias render male victims "invisible" or less worthy than female victims. Rather, male domestic violence victimization has failed to emerge as an equally prevalent or serious social problem because of the overwhelmingly larger numbers of female victims of domestic assault and homicide who come to the attention of police authorities, and courts. It is this body of evidence that feminists have drawn upon in their highly successful effort to mobilize public concern, and it is this concern that shapes policy in Canada.

Methodology - Chapter Three

Content Analysis:

Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analysing the content of texts (Holsti 1968; Neuman 2000). The content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated. The text is anything written, visual or spoken that serves as a medium for communication. It includes books, newspaper or magazine articles, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films or works of art. Content analysis allows a researcher to explore the content (messages, meanings, symbols) in a source of communication (a book, article, movie). With content analysis, a researcher can compare content across many texts and analyse it with quantitative techniques such as charts and tables. Furthermore, the researcher can uncover aspects of the text's content that are difficult to see (Holsti 1968). Content analysis can document, in "objective", or at least quantitative terms, whether "vague feelings based on unsystematic observation are true" (Neuman 2000:293). The purpose here is for the researcher to disprove, or confirm observations of meanings, ideas, themes etc. conveyed in the pieces. It is not about discovering the "truth", but rather documenting "occurrences" and "reoccurrences" throughout research material.

Content analysis yields repeatable, precise results about the text. For example, through the use of content analysis, a researcher can observe if a particular theme is present over much of the material being studied. In the case of the current research project, several newspaper articles on domestic violence were explored for the presence

of particular themes relating to the variable of gender, and gender distribution among perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse. Through the use of content analysis, reoccurring themes can be observed in the articles. These results are both repeatable and precise in that another researcher examining the same topic or theme, and observing the same articles will obtain similar results.

Content analysis is useful for three types of research problems. First, content analysis is helpful for problems involving a large volume of text, such as years of newspaper articles. As with the current research project, it is unmanageable, if not impossible to handle such a vast amount of material. Content analysis proves useful here because the process of uncovering ideas, themes, meanings etc. in the articles can reduce the volume of material without compromising the validity of the research. Second, content analysis is useful when a topic must be studied “at a distance”, as with historical documents or writings of someone who is dead. Here, the researcher cannot observe the phenomenon directly, and is relying upon written material to contain the information needed. The researcher cannot ask the author their intended meaning, and must pull it from the material studied. There is great reliance here upon content analysis and its ability to produce valid results. Finally, content analysis can uncover messages in a text that are difficult to see with casual observation (Neuman 2000:293). Simply reading a piece once will not reveal these deep-seated messages. Through a more thorough and in-depth scrutiny of the material, as is done through content analysis, a deeper message can be discovered and explored.

Content analysis is not without its criticisms, however. One such charge is that

generalizations researchers make on the basis of content analysis are “limited to the cultural communication itself” (Neuman 2000:293). Therefore, observations are restricted to cultural interpretations, and the environment in which they are made. A researcher cannot possibly make an observation or generalization outside the “cultural communication” since the researcher does not exist outside of this communication, nor experience it. “Content analysis cannot determine the truthfulness of a declaration, nor evaluate the aesthetic qualities of literature. It reveals the content in text, but cannot interpret the content’s significance” (Neuman 2000:293). Therefore, content analysis remains a method of inquiry, an academic tool; it remains the task of the researcher to draw conclusions based on patterns found within the text. Researchers should examine the text directly, and remember that content analysis is a “supplement to, not a substitute for, subjective examination of documents” (Holsti 1968:602). Content analysis facilitates objective research, but remains in and of itself neither subjective nor objective (see also Reiner 2002).

Most content analyses of the mass media have been within a positivist model. Reiner (2002) comments on the advisability of going beyond “positivist” approaches when using content analysis to analyse news media. Reiner argues that the fundamental problem with traditional content analyses is that they “collate ‘message attributes’ according to characteristics set *a priori* by the observer. But what in the abstract may seem to be the ‘same’ image may have very different meanings within particular narrative genres and contexts of reception” (Reiner 2002:378). Further, Reiner points out that the “objectivity” of “content analysis lies in the precision of the statistical

manipulation of data” (Reiner 2002:378). However, the quantification within content analysis is not necessarily misleading. Any study of content denotes some quantification - comparing and contrasting “observed behaviour with an assumed norm” (Reiner 2002:379). In addition, the statistical manipulation of categories should not be eliminated. Reiner claims that “the questions raised are about the claims of positivist content analysis to quantify in a value-free way aspects of a supposed objective structure in texts. Counting features of texts should be self-consciously seen as based on the observer’s frame of reference, according to explicit criteria” (Reiner 2002:379). Results from content analysis must be understood “reflexively and tentatively” as one possible viewpoint. As such, content analysis can yield valuable insights into the significance of trends and patterns.

Measures:

In order to obtain the sample, I first defined the unit of analysis, the population and the sampling strategy. My population includes all articles published in the Toronto Star, and the Toronto Sun between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2000. My sample is a group of selected articles on domestic violence that have been published in these two Ontario newspapers (selected as discussed below). My unit of analysis is each article examined, with the following parameters: multi part articles count as one article; each piece must have a minimum size of ten lines in order to be counted as an article; advertisements, announcements, letters to the editor, film, book and television reviews do not count as articles, although articles discussing domestic violence topics inspired by films, books or

television were included. These parameters were established in order to eliminate articles, and narrow down the volume of material since the number of articles to be examined would be virtually unmanageable. Multi-part articles, such as ones that were split into several sections throughout the paper, were counted as one article simply because essentially they were one article. Counting each piece as a separate article would skew the results in that it would imply that there were more articles in the paper(s) on domestic violence than there was. Ten lines was chosen as a pseudo-arbitrary cut off point to eliminate articles because during preliminary research, articles that did not exceed ten lines tended not to contain adequate information for the purposes of this project. Advertisements, announcements, film, book and television reviews did not count as articles since I was not concerned with these aspects. I was interested in the coverage of domestic violence as provided by the newspapers and journalists, not with opinions of films, books or television programs on the topic, nor advertisements and announcements concerning domestic violence. However, as indicated previously, some articles discussing various topics regarding domestic violence were inspired by films, books, or television that dealt with the topic, and therefore were included in the analysis. Letters to the editor were eliminated because, although interesting, they represented the opinions of the general public, and not the coverage of the newspapers and their respective journalists/reporters.

My construct of "coverage" (of domestic violence) includes the amount of coverage, the prominence of the coverage, and whether the coverage focuses on one gender over the other. My measure attempts to capture "attitudes" toward males and the

perceived gender roles they play in the realm of domestic violence. In addition to defining my population and sampling element, I constructed a definition, or parameters, of domestic violence, as well as what constituted a victim of domestic violence. My construct of “domestic abuse” was defined by the police, and the two newspapers that I examined, since the cases that I explored were the cases that came to the attention of the media, which usually involved the police (see Reiner 2002). This definition refers to the use of physical force or restraint performed with the intention or perceived intention of causing harm to another individual. The range of attacks captured in media accounts of domestic violence for male and female victims is similar. Acts of domestic violence range from slapping or punching to lethal uses of physical force, and include acts of arson, stabbings, shootings, and other serious violent acts.

My research substantiates that media-reported cases included physical acts of violence perpetrated by a male or female partner, or ex-partner, in the context of an intimate (dating or spousal) relationship, including domestic homicide. This definition of domestic violence excluded violence perpetrated by siblings and other familial relations, strangers and friends. The reason these types of violent relationships were not included in the construct of domestic violence for the purposes of this research is because my particular interest is in domestic violence as it pertained to female and male partners and ex-partners in intimate (dating or spousal) relationships, and not other violent interactions of family members.

The reported prevalence rates of domestic violence greatly fluctuate depending upon research methodology and varying definitions and constructions of the term. For

the purposes of this study, the prevalence data referred to victims of domestic violence in Canada only.

Procedures:

I had a choice whether to examine the issues surrounding domestic violence using either latent or manifest coding. Latent coding, also referred to as semantic analysis, “looks for the underlying, implicit meaning in the context of a text” (Neuman 2000:296). For example, a researcher reads an entire paragraph and decides whether it contains the themes or mood he/she is looking for. The researcher’s coding system has general rules to guide interpretation of the text and for determining whether certain themes or moods are present (Neuman 2000). For latent coding, the researcher needs to create “rules” to guide judgments. If she or he discovers the theme in the text, as determined by the utilization of the coding system, then the article is “flagged”. For example, I examined various characteristics of the article, including which newspaper the article was in, the different political slants the newspapers had, the date of the article, as constructions changed over the decade, the length of the article, and its topic area. In addition, I looked at the people in the article, paying attention to the mention of an organization, protests, gender of the individuals, victim and offender. “Characteristics of the article” were used to judge the newspapers’ opinion of the importance of the topic, remembering that each journalist has his or her own political agenda/perspective, while “people in the article” was used to identify the players and situate them appropriately in the topic. By determining the players, I refer to the roles of victim and perpetrator, which characterize

their importance within the coding system.

Manifest coding is a method of coding the visible, surface content in a text, as for example the number of times a phrase or word appears in the written text (Neuman 2000). With manifest coding, the researcher creates a list of characteristics, adjectives and phrases. If an individual, group or situation in a sampled article is referred to through one of these adjective and/or phrases, than the article enters into the sample (Neuman 2000). This method is best used with a computer program that searches for words or phrases in text and does the counting work. Latent coding tends to be less reliable than manifest coding. It depends largely upon the coder's knowledge of language and social meaning. This is a problem due to issues of interpretation. For latent coding, the researcher must determine the meaning(s), or intended meaning(s), of the words/phrases present in the material. This interpretation is reliant upon the researchers' understanding of words/phrases as they pertain to his/her own language(s), and comprehension of the language(s), as well as, the social ramifications of these words/phrases within society in relation to their language(s), and their understanding of the language(s). However, the validity of latent coding exceeds that of manifest coding because the reliance is upon conveying meaning, and not just on specific words (Neuman 2000).

Manifest coding is highly reliable because the phrase or word is either present or not in the text. It allows one to sort through an extensive amount of material in order to find relevant journals/articles/material, and therefore facilitates smoother research.

However, manifest coding does not take into account the implications or meanings of the

words or phrases. Manifest coding may not work due to a shared language of meaning, innuendo and synonyms. The same word can have multiple meanings depending on the context. This possibility of multiple meanings limits the measurement validity of manifest coding (Neuman 2000). Simply pulling material based solely upon keywords, phrases etc., fails to consider the meaning(s) of the material, and relevant information may be overlooked, while irrelevant material is included.

For the purposes of this research, I used a combination of both coding methods. I chose this approach because I felt a blend of the two coding methods was more thorough, and therefore more reliable. I wanted to avoid complete dependence upon one coding method over the other, and minimize errors in the collection of material. I felt that implementing the two techniques was a proficient way of increasing the validity and reliability of the research project. First, I utilized the archive search programs (manifest coding method) present on both the Star and the Sun web sites in order to identify articles containing material on domestic violence. In order to minimize the exclusion of material relevant to my project, a considerable problem and concern for the validity of the study, I created an extensive list of various word combinations and phrases (Appendix A) in an effort to uncover as much information as possible. I then typed the various combinations into the title, text and lead sentence boxes in the archive search section and used the program to “flag” key words in the text. Although this method produced duplicate articles, it proved to be very effective in assembling an exhaustive list. I included a specific search for CTS studies, but the search yielded no data. However, I found these studies in my general search on domestic violence. The volume

of articles produced by the key word search on both the Star and the Sun archive web sites was enormous. Certainly, not all of the articles located during the search were relevant to the research project, so some pieces had to be eliminated through a consistent and logical process.

First, since different combinations of words in both the text and lead sentence boxes produced identical material, I eliminated repeat articles in order to avoid skewing the results through double, or even multiple counting and analysing. It was important to avoid duplicate articles in order to ensure the research fairly and accurately represented the content of each newspaper.

Second, articles were eliminated that did not fit the “criteria” outlined earlier in the “Measures” section - articles less than ten lines in length, letters to the editor, advertisements, film, book and television reviews. It is interesting to note that letters to the editor provided an insightful and fascinating look into the issue of domestic violence. The various letters illustrated the differing opinions of individuals in society regarding the issues surrounding domestic violence and the coverage that the newspapers, and ultimately the “spin” journalists were putting upon the topic. While letters to the editor provided such information, and were useful in determining the public’s view of domestic violence, they did not fit prior criteria, and essentially were irrelevant to the project since the interest was in the coverage provided by the newspapers and their journalists/reporters, not the opinion of the general public. Although what editorials the newspapers chose to publish represented certain views or politics of the paper, again I was interested in the articles written by journalists and reporters, not letters penned by

the general public.

Finally, articles that were produced during the key word search that were not about domestic violence were eliminated. These articles appeared during the search because one of the key words was present in either the title or the text of the piece. However, the actual content of the article was irrelevant because the piece had nothing to do with domestic violence/abuse/assault etc. For example, numerous articles regarding sporting events were produced during the key word search for “battering” on both the Star and the Sun archive search engines because several journalists chose to utilize the term when referring to the particular performance of a sports team.

After this preliminary review, I examined the text of the articles for specific themes, using the characteristics of the newspaper and people listed above under latent coding. (What is the newspaper? What is the date of the article? How large is the article? What was its topic area? How many people are named in the article/is there any mention of an organization? Any protests? What is the gender of the people? Victim? Offender?).

Due to time and fiscal constraints, only a limited number of newspapers - two, the Star and the Sun - and cases, could be chosen for analysis. The articles were selected based upon criteria previously outlined, including being published between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2000. These articles are not representative of all the issues regarding domestic violence in Canada's history. If this was a project that attempted to create an overview of all domestic violence issues and struggles that have occurred, than articles dating back to the early 1800s would have to be included and examined for their

treatment of the issue, which was not referred to as domestic violence at the time. This limit of articles based upon time period could be considered a drawback in the research, however, this study focuses on domestic violence and the framing of the issue in the print media since 1990, and not before.

There are several constraints faced in newspaper selection which may result in problems for the study, the main one being cost. The cost of gaining access to the archived articles discouraged incorporating more newspapers into the study. However, this was a secondary concern as, stated in the introduction, these municipal papers were chosen because they provided adequate coverage of domestic violence in Ontario, as well as providing two very different perspectives on the same topic within the same area.

In total, I looked at 2177 articles. The Toronto Star yielded a total of 1063 pieces (Appendix B), while the Toronto Sun provided 1114 articles (Appendix C). Of these, 482 were relevant to my research, 225 being from the Star (Appendix D) and 257 being from the Sun (Appendix E).

Problems: Issues for Conducting Research:

When conducting research there are particular components that are crucial - the validity and reliability of the information provided, and the ethical issues which are involved in conducting research. Since I conducted a content analysis of the newsprint media, and did not engage in interviews with human subjects, the issue of ethics was not as important to my research model. For example, I was not required to clear a "questionnaire" or "research design" with an ethics board. However, I did have to ensure

that I presented the material I obtained accurately, and truthfully, and refrained from presenting other researchers' works as my own.

I chose to utilize a content analysis approach as opposed to interviewing individuals in society, because I was interested in how the print media portrayed the issue of domestic violence, and "constructed" gender roles within the phenomenon. The issue of gender asymmetry/symmetry in domestic violence has been one of great interest in the past several years, as discussed in the previous chapter. Although opinions of various individuals in society was of great interest to me, the purpose of such interviewing, and subsequently compiling "data" was irrelevant to my research goal. I chose to do a content analysis of newspapers because the media is where most people get their information, and is the tool they use to form opinions. Therefore, I wanted to explore how the print media characterizes the issues of domestic violence and the roles men and women play as victims and perpetrators.

Validity and reliability were also important to my examination, as they are with all types of research. The issue of whether or not my selection and interpretation of the material was valid, was complicated by the fact that all parties contributing to the accounts that appeared in the media articles (violence participants, police, reporters, editors) could be expected to exclude or enhance information regarding the situation. The author's "slant" and the newspapers' political or social ideology unavoidably affects the content of the article (Browning and Dutton 1986). Although the reporters write with objectivity as an underlying goal, inevitably subjectivity emerges. Personal opinions, views, morals and ethics seep through in the content and theme of the piece. It was

important, therefore, not to generalize the pieces found in the various newspapers, to the phenomena of domestic violence itself. Different journalists in the same newspaper commonly presented different points of view, thus political and ideological ideas were not uniformed among journalists employed by the newspapers. It was important for me to be aware, therefore, of various standpoints and biases, personal and otherwise, in order to capture the “validity” presented in each article is a product of these processes (Krefting 1991).

Along with validity, there was the issue of the reliability of the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This issue of reliability is commonly aligned with the issues of consistency, dependability, predictability, stability and accuracy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). However, reliability is different in cases of content analysis. Reliability in content analysis relates to issues of coding. Latent coding, tends to have problems with reliability because it depends upon a “coder’s knowledge of language and social meaning” (Neuman 2000:296). Training, practice and written rules are methods that improve reliability, “but still it is difficult to consistently identify themes, moods and the like” (Neuman 2000:296). While this problem could not be completely reconciled since I dealt with a great deal of themes throughout the pieces I examined, it was important to be aware of the issue. In order to minimize problems with reliability, I reviewed the various articles numerous times paying special attention to the themes, moods etc., that I had identified as criteria for inclusion in the research material.

For my purposes for the current research project, I want to explore how the Ontario newsprint media “constructs” gender with regards to victims, and perpetrators of

domestic violence. Limitations aside, the research model discussed above proves to be an effective method for conducting my study.

Findings - Chapter Four

Working Hypothesis:

I have conducted this research project with the working hypothesis that a review of Canadian newsprint media would find that the media under-represents male domestic violence victimization, and that it would promote policy focused principally on female victimization. Specifically, I have hypothesized that the Star and the Sun would reproduce and reflect stereotypical constructions of domestic violence as exclusively or overwhelmingly male perpetrated, and that these media sources would, in effect, render male victimization “invisible”. However, as I will demonstrate, male victimization is treated in complex and contradictory ways in Toronto Star and Toronto Sun media reports and commentary. On the one hand, there is a great deal of similarity in the coverage of domestic violence, regardless of the gender of the perpetrators, and despite the different political stances of the two newspapers. On the other hand, the papers take distinctly opposing positions on whether male domestic violence victimization is or should be recognized as a social problem, comparable to or equivalent with female domestic violence victimization.

The Toronto Star Versus the Toronto Sun:

The two papers sampled for this study are the Toronto Star and the Toronto Sun. Both papers are published and distributed seven days a week in the Greater Toronto Area. According to projections by the Audi Bureau of Circulation, which compiles “one day”

averages based on paid-for papers over a 12 month period ending September 30, 2002; together these newspapers reach close to a million readers on at least one day of every week. The Star has a daily distribution Monday through Friday of 454,348 papers, a Saturday distribution of 672,424 papers, and a Sunday distribution of 433,612 papers. The Sun has a daily distribution Monday through Friday of 219,469 papers, a Saturday distribution of 175,783 papers, and a Sunday distribution of 360,299 papers.

This study involves the analysis of 482 articles on domestic violence incidents and policies from the two newspapers, published over the decade of the 1990s: 225 or 47% from the Star and 257 or 53% from the Sun. Although the two newspapers published relatively equal numbers of articles on domestic violence, the Sun had proportionately more news articles reporting incidents than the Star, and consequently a lower proportion of policy-oriented articles. Of the 257 Sun articles 44% were policy-oriented, compared to 63% of the 225 Star articles. Moreover, based on May 14, 2003 data, the Sun, compared to the Star, provides significantly more coverage to domestic violence issues, proportional to all issues reported and commented upon, than does the Star. The Star provides 89 pages measuring approximately 44 pages to news and commentary, and the Sun provides 72 pages measuring approximately 39 pages to news and commentary. Of these, the Sun provides 12 articles on domestic violence issues compared to the Star, which provides 7 articles on domestic violence issues.

Regardless of differences in the size and focus of articles on domestic violence in the two papers, the large number of articles on this issue across the papers illustrates the extent to which domestic violence was a principal focus of attention in the Toronto

newsprint media over the decade of the 1990s. Importantly, difference in constructions of domestic violence and the relevance of gender to this phenomenon between the Star and the Sun are subtle, and on the surface insignificant. This similarity holds regardless of whether the analysis focuses upon headlines, content, or language of the articles. Surprisingly, it holds regardless of the gender of identified perpetrators and victims and regardless of the political stance of the newspapers.

Core similarities are due, in part, to the intrinsic nature of the articles, and the sources of data these newspapers rely upon. The intrinsic nature of the articles does much to explain the similar constructions of domestic violence whether perpetrated by males or females across the newspaper. Most of the articles in the newspapers that were examined are descriptive rather than investigative or explorative. As such, the journalists attempt to communicate the preliminary effects of domestic violence by providing information regarding the what, where, when and who of the incident/issue, and possible perpetrators and victims.

Second, the two newspapers rely on the same governmental agencies, departments and offices as a source for their information about statistics. This leads to the newspapers having similar official descriptions of domestic violence, issues surrounding domestic violence and its current trends. As a result, there is very little variation in the write up of articles.

Finally, there appear to be limited ways to convey the messages regarding domestic violence issues. More specifically, a typical article discusses the severity of the incident, the victim(s) and perpetrator(s), the location, and the impact the incident has on

society. This pattern occurs even in articles regarding policy making, legislation etc., even when the focus is not necessarily on one specific incident. Although this is the case, politically oriented articles briefly present specific incidents, and move quickly to the “true” focus of the articles. The purpose of presenting the domestic violence incident is to attract attention, not monopolize it.

The major similarity in the two newspapers is the tendency for articles to characterize victims and perpetrators in dichotomous innocent/villainous terms regardless of their sex or gender. That is, across the two papers most incident-based domestic violence articles portray male and female perpetrators in a degrading or less than flattering light, while victims across sexes are portrayed as innocent. This is exemplified in two Star and two Sun articles. The first Star article, “Ex-boyfriend Jailed for Life in Killing” describes the female victim as “a beautiful person in every way, just amazing” and describes the male perpetrator as “selfish, cruel and cowardly”. The second Star article, “Wife Sets Husband Alight for Eating Easter Bunny” uses similar characterizations, though the gender roles are reversed. Here the male victim is characterized as “trusting”, and the female perpetrator is described as “malicious” and “brutal”. The two Sun articles mirror this pattern: “Wife Beater Gets 31 Years; Attacked her With a Bat” and “Husband-Stabber gets Two Years Probation”. These articles refer to the victim as “helpless”, and the abuser as “vicious”, regardless of whether these roles are filled by a male or a female.

This similarity, however, is offset by the proportion of articles with female versus male victims and perpetrators. The vast majority of incident-based articles involve male

perpetrators and female victims. Serious incidents of domestic violence involving bodily harm were almost the exclusive domain of female victims. As I discuss later in this Chapter, this statistical fact has a significant impact on the construction of domestic violence as a gendered phenomenon.

Similar to incident-based articles, which characterized victims and offenders in moral rather than gendered roles, policy-oriented articles characteristically used gender neutral language. Of the 255 articles that were policy related in both newspapers, 113 or 44% either used gender neutral language, or made no specific reference to the gender of the victims or perpetrators. This issue is discussed further in the chapter under the sub section “Articles and Headlines”.

The differences in reporting patterns relate to the major difference in the two newspapers. The papers exhibit distinct and opposing political slants. The Star leans more to the political left and generally supports feminist causes and analyses, while the Sun leans more to the political right, and is critical of feminism and supportive of men’s rights challenges to feminist endorsed policies and analyses. However, neither newspaper is very far from political center. While both papers definitely “lean” in ways which fit with the political preferences of specific audiences, for example liberal versus conservative, both the Star and the Sun maintain a sense of political balance in reporting the “facts”. This indicates practicality on the newspapers’ part since it would be impossible for any newspaper to attract a large reader base if their version of events was incredibly different from other newspapers (Reiner 2002), particularly if the newspapers were charged with spouting right- or left-wing political rhetoric, and not the facts. Still,

the political culture of these two newspapers accounts for significant differences in the extent of domestic violence incidents coverage, and in the commentary on men's rights efforts to achieve recognition as victims. Importantly, similarities in reporting practices does not mean that the two papers employ similar strategies to attract a readership. Indeed, the Star and the Sun utilize different strategies, and provide different interpretations of events. As well, the choices of events deemed newsworthy differ. The point is that neither newspaper relies solely upon its political influence for presenting news coverage, yet both display political agency.

The number of articles devoted to domestic violence, and the political stance of the newspapers are two aspects of the newsprint media that contribute to the construction of domestic violence as male perpetrated, despite similarities in the ways victims and perpetrators are described, and despite the use of gender neutral language in policy-oriented discussions. To explore these differences, I now turn to the content of the headlines and articles, to the language utilized within the articles, and the extent to which the newspapers' provide national and local coverage.

Headlines:

The articles, and the headlines of the articles in the two newspapers were analyzed for aspects or wording that would make an impression, or distinguish one set of headlines, or articles from another. On the surface, there appears to be a great deal of similarity among the headlines and articles in both the Star and the Sun. However, the overall focus of each newspaper differed extensively.

A typical article headline, when referring to incidents of domestic violence, indicated a perpetrator and victim, the offence and occasionally the location or situation. For example, two headlines in the Star read, “Wife Sets Husband Alight for Eating Easter Bunny”, and “Man Shoots Ex-Wife, Commits Suicide”. These headlines contain all three elements. Each identify the offender, the victim, the offense and the situation. This generic format is repeated throughout both newspapers, despite their differing political orientation. When referring to policy making, legislation, funding etc., the headlines outline exactly what issue is being discussed/examined/explored, and why, plus any action that is being taken or may be taken. For example, in the Star, a headline read “\$12 Million Pledged to Help Assault Victims, Minorities”. Similarly, in the Sun, “Metro Oks \$50Gs for Wife Abuse Alarms”. Again, a consistent format is followed. Each headline states the issue(s) being examined, the reason behind the examination, and the course of action taken.

Within this consistent format, there is a disparity in coverage of domestic violence based upon gender. This is evident in the headlines used in the two newspapers utilized for this study. In the Star, of the 83 articles published concerning incidents of domestic violence, 76 headlines indicated male aggressors and/or female victims, while only seven headlines indicated female aggressors and/or male victims. This means 92% of all the article headlines regarding incidents of domestic violence indicated the story concerned female victims, while 8% of the headlines concerned male victims. Similarly, in the Sun, 125 of the 144 article headlines regarding incidents of domestic violence indicated male aggressors, and/or female victims, while 19 headlines indicated female

aggressors, and/or male victims; 87% versus 13%.

These findings cannot be assumed to support the hypothesis that gender bias is a major factor in the reporting of domestic violence incidents and issues in the newsprint media, however. These statistics are roughly equivalent to official rates of male and female victimization, as captured in recent Statistics Canada reports on violence (Fitzgerald 1999; Bunge 2000; Trainor 2002). This suggests that the visibility or invisibility of male victimization is rooted not in media practices, but rather in the police practices from which media sources obtain their reports. In policy-based reports, in both newspapers a significant number of headlines did not indicate the gender of the victims, or the offenders. This pattern was evident in both newspapers in policy-based domestic violence articles, and not in incident-based reports.

In incident-based accounts, the sex or gender of a perpetrator and victim were consistently identified. In policy discussions, however, in the Star, 62 or 44% of all article headlines, and in the Sun 51 or 45% of all article headlines, did not identify the gender of the victims or the offenders. Some examples from the Star are “Ontario Eyes ‘Better Ways’ to Handle Spousal Abuse, Harnick Seeking Tougher System”, “Domestic Violence Courts to Double in Ontario”, “Tracking Course of Domestic Violence” and “Domestic Assault Courts to Open”. Similar practices are evident in Sun headlines, as for example “New Courts Target Domestic Violence”, “New Law Protects Abused Spouses”, “More Ways to Fight Domestic Abuse”, “A Roar Against Family Violence” and “Give Beaten Spouses Bail Say: Expert”.

The headlines of each article, regardless of focus, whether incident-based or

legislatively oriented, reveal a great deal about the article, the journalist, and the newspaper itself. The content of the headlines is as equally important as the content of the articles. The headline is what the reader sees first, and often affects the decision to read the article, as well as influencing the reader's opinion *before* they begin to read the story. Headlines provide basic information regarding the article, and are an extremely effective way for "grabbing" attention. Sensational, or shocking headlines, are more compelling, and more likely to attract the attention of the reader than dull, or lifeless headlines. For example, among headlines that appeared in the Star, "Man Kicks his way into Shelter and Kills a Woman", and "Woman Said 'I Love You' to her Killer, Trial Told" are more eye catching, and likely to attract attention than "A Day in the K-Court" or "The Other Side of Super Sunday". Similarly, in the Sun, headlines like "Wife Beater gets 31 Years; Attacked her With a Bat" and "Hubby Stands by Attacker; Wife Sliced Scrotum" are more affective in peeking the curiosity of the reader than "No Shelter for Shame" or "Telling Messages".

This is not to imply that the content of the article itself is not important, or interesting. However, it is the headline that is designed to attract the attention of the reading audience. The exploration of the content and themes presented in both the headlines and articles in the Star, and the Sun, are both important to understanding how domestic violence is reported in the newsprint media.

Article Content:

Statistically, there is a substantial difference in the proportion of articles dedicated to issues involving women compared to issues involving men as victims of domestic violence. While this result is not surprising given the disproportionate victimization of women in domestic assault charges, hospital reports, and especially domestic homicides, it nevertheless projects an image that domestic violence victimization is by its nature something that happens overwhelmingly to women.

Of the 83 articles on domestic violence incidents analyzed from the Star, only 7 (8%) were dedicated to male victims of violence and men's issues, while the Sun devoted 19 (13%) of its total of 144 articles to male victims and issues. These data support the hypothesis that gender constructions of domestic violence exist in Ontario newsprint media, at least in the Star which significantly under-reports female perpetration if official police reports are taken as the "real" measures - in 1997 through 2000, approximately 13% to 15% of all domestic assaults, as discussed in the literature review chapter.

When analyzing incident-based reports, patterned differences in the reporting of incidents emerged. It became apparent that the newsprint media focuses on different facets of domestic violence depending upon the situation, and the gender of the victims. Specifically, when the newsprint media address incidents of domestic violence against women, the focus is on the relationship between victim and offender, and the severity of the assault. These articles generally include the public's reaction to the incident, recent changes in policy or legislation, and various organizations' or groups' responses. For

example, after much coverage of “escalating” rates of domestic violence against women, and the lack of shelter space for these abused women to “escape” to, the public, various groups and women’s activists pushed for more funding from the government to support women’s shelters. The political, or legislative, response from the government to the request for more funding for shelters was a review of the budget, and the allocation of funds available to women’s programs, groups and shelters. Similarly, these “escalating” incidents of violence against women motivated groups and organizations to petition the government for a review of the legal system, specifically how abusers were being addressed in court. Following a review of the courts, and possible leniency in sentencing of abusers, the newsprint media focused on the implementation of a special domestic violence court.

In contrast, when the newsprint media address incidents of domestic violence against men, the focus is not on the relationship between victim and offender, nor the severity of the assault, but rather on the provocation of the offender by the victim. In other words, what *he* did to make *her* hit or physically assault him. This is not to imply that the issues of the relationship between the victim and the offender, and the severity of the abuse are not relayed in the article. However, these issues are not the primary focus, as they are in articles addressing domestic violence against women.

It is important to note that the Sun gives far more attention to male victims of domestic violence than does the Star. It seems that the Sun is intent on portraying women as perpetrators, as illustrated in the number of incident-based articles involving female perpetrated domestic violence published in the Sun compared to the number of

articles published in the Star. This difference may be attributed to the newspapers' political affiliations, or the target audience. This trend is discussed further in the next section "Policy-based reports".

In policy-based reports, both the Star and the Sun published several articles regarding issues surrounding domestic violence including legislative responses, funding for shelters, programs and other initiatives, changes in laws and the implementation of new policies. As stated previously in this chapter, both newspapers devoted a great deal of space to policy-oriented articles; 44% of domestic violence articles published in the Sun, and 63% published in the Star. Of these, several articles did not specify the gender of victims or perpetrators. Of the 113 policy-oriented articles published in the Sun, 51 articles or 45% were gender neutral, while 50 articles or 44% were female oriented, and 12 articles or 11% were male oriented. Of the 142 policy-oriented articles published in the Star, 62 articles or 44% were gender neutral, while 76 articles or 53% were female oriented, and 4 articles or 3% were male oriented.

Many of the policy-oriented articles published in both newspapers tended to employ gender neutral terminology. For example, in the Star, an article entitled "Special Abuse Court Urged" discusses the push by crown prosecutors to "establish a separate courtroom to deal exclusively with people accused of battering their partners". The article does not designate a gender to either the perpetrator or the victim, rather the journalist states that the "main goal of domestic violence court is to give prosecutors better tools to deal with that central problem of the reluctant victim", making no clear reference to the gender of the victim.

This pattern emerges in the Sun as well. An article entitled “Tories to get Tough on Domestic Violence” specifically outlines the Ontario government’s plan to combat domestic violence. The article remains gender neutral when referring to victims and offenders. The article states that “intervention orders prohibit contact between alleged abusers and victims and provide additional ways to help keep victims safe”. In addition, “victims of domestic abuse will be able to get emergency intervention orders 24 hours a day, seven days a week”. Again, much like the article in the Star, the journalist does not assign a specific gender to either the victim or the perpetrator.

Despite the presence of several gender neutral policy-based articles in both newspapers, the papers differed in its general support of female versus male victims. The Star was more pro-feminist, while the Sun was more pro-men’s rights.

The Star published several domestic violence articles relating to feminism and women’s rights, and employed feminist rhetoric. This is illustrated in an article entitled “The War On Women: Men’s Rights Groups Have Turned Their Anger on the Women Who Are Fighting to End Violence in Their Lives”, published in 2000. This article does not really address men’s rights groups, but rather focuses on abusive men and their behaviours. The article is written by a feminist who champions the fight by women against domestic violence. She points out that “strides” have been made by feminists, and that feminists have effected changes in police practices, the courts, and the media. She argues that a significant rise in “anti-woman propaganda and a near hysterical anti-feminist backlash” has emerged. As evidence of this propaganda and backlash, she points to studies that claim women are as violent as men. The journalist is troubled that

“the gendered nature of violence is disappearing under a cloak of liberalism”, and that the notion that “violence is wrong no matter who is doing it” is obscuring issues of “motive and context”, rendering them “immaterial”. Further, the journalist asserts that “claiming they are equal victims of women’s violence in the home, abusive men have demanded that police crack down on ‘women’s violence’”. She maintains that the result is “an alarming increase in the laying of criminal charges against women who have struck back at their partners in self defence or to protect their children”. As noted in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis, this argument is advanced by many feminist activists and researchers (see Snider 1995), though in Canada this trend is not evidenced (as of yet) in significant increases in the proportion of charges laid against women (Tutty 1999; Bunge 2000).

This targeting of men’s groups in discussions of domestic violence against women is evidenced in another article published in the Star entitled “Women’s Legal Victories Were Hard Fought”, published in 1998. The article addresses the fight by women against domestic violence, specifically in relation to feminist arguments, and their efforts. The journalist asserts that progress made by women in the fight against domestic violence is the result of “costly victories built on the bedrock of decades of work by feminist activists”. The article is presented as a “journal of the unseen world - a slow, sometimes heart-breaking, inch-by-inch progress toward fairness, justice and equality, a grassroots effort that is rarely glimpsed in the ‘headline today, forgotten tomorrow’ world of the popular media”. This pro-feminist stance is present in other articles in the Star, for example “Women Feel Media Backlash on Wife Abuse”,

“Backlash Babes Turn Back Clock on Feminism”, “Unfair Media Biases Scrutinized by Women” and “Women Lash Back at Report”.

In contrast, the Sun published several domestic violence articles relating to men’s rights issues, and employed men’s rights rhetoric as illustrated in an article entitled “Men’s Movement is Feminization of Society”, published in 1996. This article asserts that the feminist push for equality in society is at the expense of men, and that although great strides have been made in the feminist movement, much of the accomplishments have excluded men from society altogether. The journalist claims that the hope of many for feminism was “that patriarchal society would change into a liberal-democratic society in which both men and women could retain their individual identities”. However, instead of this equality, society has “leap-frogged into the group society and decided that the favoured group of the movement is the female”. The journalist asserts that “for the past 10 years at least, being a male has had aspects rather like being a Jew in Germany during the 1930s, or a German in the postwar period. All Jews were equated with evil, and virtually all post war Germans with being mass murderers”. The journalist further asserts that the male in our society is “exposed to official statements and exhortations that describe him as some sort of dangerous, ill-behaved animal based solely on the fact that he is male”, and that unlike men “women have been given special privileges right down to the 007 license to kill abusing spouses in their sleep or unwanted children in their womb”. The journalist concludes that therefore, feminism is “a movement with a clear agenda to seize power and socially engineer society to suit its own purposes”.

This men’s rights argument is advanced in the Literature Review chapter of this

thesis (see discussions by Farrell 1993; Williams and Williams 1995; Messner 1998). It is present in several other articles published in the Sun, for example “Challenging Feminist Myths”, “Not Just Another Kick in the Pants”, “Study Reveals Crimes by Women Skyrocketing”, “Documentary a Slap in Face” and “Abuse Ads Called Biased: Women said Equally to Blame in Domestic Attacks”. These disparate discursive practices support the hypothesis that constructions of domestic violence are “gendered” in the two newsprint media sources sampled in this study. However, the specifics vary by the political stance of the paper. While both papers focus primarily upon female victims and male offenders, when male victimization is addressed two distinctly different arguments are advanced, as is also the case in commentary on issues surrounding domestic violence, such as funding, policy making, shelters, legislation, and government initiatives. In the Star, male victims of domestic violence and men’s issues are downplayed or characterized as “backlash”, while in the Sun feminist dismissals of male victims is equated with Nazism.

These rhetorical practices aside, across the two newspapers incident-based articles and policy articles both tend to emphasize or concentrate on female victims and male perpetrators. This emphasis or concentration has a twofold explanation. First, incidents involving male victims of domestic violence are not covered in depth. This lack of material may be due to a failure of discovery because of the media’s primary sources. Incidents of domestic violence, and the issues surrounding it, usually are reported and discussed in the newsprint media by the police, and various government agencies. These informants are relied upon heavily by the newsprint media. Sixty seven

percent of all articles from both newspapers depended upon law enforcement, and/or government agencies for their information. As discussed earlier in this thesis, female victimization is predominant in both law enforcement and governmental statistics. Therefore, incidents of domestic violence involving female victims come to the attention of the newsprint media far more often than incidents involving male victims. In addition, if there are substantially fewer male victims of domestic violence than female victims, male victims and men's issues are of less concern since the numbers indicate to the public at large that men are not in trouble, nor in need of services, while female victims are the ones in danger, and in need of aid.

Second, the general theme throughout the articles published in the two newspapers is one of the female victim in need of rescuing and care. This image is evident in the numerous articles published in both the Star and the Sun that focus upon the need for more shelters and services for victimized women. For example, "Silent Alarms Offered to Abused Women" and "Help on the Way for Victims of Wife Assault" published in the Star, and "Beaten women Get Phones" and "Shelters Rip Tory Cutbacks" published in the Sun, devote a great deal of space discussing the issues of protection for victimized women, and their need for proper care. This image is not hard to sympathize with, as socially women are seen as passive and less aggressive than their male counterparts (Hartmann 2000). As indicated in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis, the image of a helpless male in need of rescuing and care runs contrary to social norms regarding gender, gender roles and characteristics, and appropriate gender behaviour (Cavender et al. 1999). Media reports in the Star and the Sun in the decade of

the 1990s sampled in this study serve to perpetuate the image that women are the primary victims of domestic violence, and that men are the primary aggressors.

This construction of females as the primary victims of domestic violence takes place in a social context in which males are less familiar to the public as victims of domestic violence, in part because statistics capture a much larger incidence rate of female versus male victimization (Tutty 1999). Consequently, male victims of domestic violence lack visibility in society, and therefore lack familiarity. This contributes to the public being less likely to consider domestic assaults against men as a matter of concern at the level of social policy. In addition, domestic violence that occurs against women is more recognizable to most of the population than domestic violence against men (Tutty 1999). This is because it is more likely that a member of the general public would know a woman who has been the victim of domestic violence, rather than a man - in part because it is more acceptable for a woman to disclose her victimization, as Lucca and Steinmetz (1988) have argued.

For a combination of reasons, the general public is more likely to request and positively receive information related to female victims. Regardless of whether media reports are or are not an accurate reflection of official policing practices, and regardless of whether policy practices capture the true extent of victimization, the domestic violence experiences of the general public, and police action to curtail female victimization together help account for differences in the coverage of male and female perpetrated domestic violence. For whatever reasons, there are far more articles in both newspapers that construct women as the victims of domestic violence and men as

perpetrators, than articles that construct men as the victims and women as perpetrators. This is the image of domestic violence that the public receives from media reports.

As discussed previously in this thesis, the newspapers provide information based in part upon the perceived desires of the reading audience, relying heavily upon their presumed knowledge or familiarity with the topic or situation. At the same time, newspapers advance political biases that are judged to be consistent with those of their audiences (Reiner 2002). The Sun appears to assume that its audience is sympathetic to men's rights arguments and rhetoric, while the Star appears to assume that its readers are more pro-feminist. It is reasonable that both are correct, since both positions are supported by publicly visible advocacy groups. This is especially evident when attention is focused upon the language utilized in the articles sampled for this study.

Language Utilized in the Articles:

Language is an extremely important aspect of communication, both verbal and written. Individuals in society use language in order to convey meaning, and relay messages. Language is not employed haphazardly however. Within language schemes or scripts exist which individuals employ in order to use and understand language, its users, and the context in which language is being utilized (Hewitt 1982). These scripts are vital in communication for individuals need to know what to expect and what is expected in social situations involving language and communication. However, language is utilized in various ways by numerous individuals and groups in society. It is important to recognize and understand that although there exists general schemes or scripts regarding

the utilization of language in society, not all language is employed in a similar manner. No where is this more evident than in the newsprint media.

Written communication is probably the hardest form of language to truly comprehend. Although the words are decipherable, and a meaning may appear clear, unless the individual who is reading the work actually wrote the piece it is unlikely that they really know or understand the true meaning of the composition (Denzin 1990). Moreover, unlike verbal communication, the written word lacks inflection. Hence, certain characteristics of the language, or emotions, may pass unnoticed, or be misinterpreted (Denzin 1990). Sarcasm, anger, despair and elation are somewhat recognizable emotions present in written language, but not always. These emotions may be overlooked by the reader, or misunderstood altogether. For example, the author of the piece may attempt to convey sarcasm, but the reader may perceive it as anger, or as seriousness. The opposite is also true.

Problems associated with conveying emotion is not the only difficulty faced when analyzing and interpreting the written word. The ways in which language can be manipulated, whether intentional or not, affects the meanings and messages conveyed in the piece. It is important to recognize that language can be employed in numerous ways to convey various meanings, and that intended messages are different from perceived messages (see Denzin 1990). Since individuals' knowledge of language varies, meanings extracted from information presented in the newsprint media also varies. Therefore, while it is vital that a journalist is aware of the language employed in order to convey that a clear meaning is being presented, it is possible that the intended meaning will not

be recognized by members of the general public. At the same time, however, journalists can use language to their advantage. By choosing particular terms and/or phrases, a journalist can convey a specific meaning or message about a topic or issue effectively “manipulating” the reading audience.

In this research project, the articles studied were examined for their use of language. Analysis was made based upon topic and gender present in each piece. As stated previously in this paper, the majority of articles concerning domestic violence incidents and issues published in both the Star and the Sun focus primarily upon female victims and women’s issues. The few articles that did cover male victims of domestic violence and men’s issues framed the incident and issues differently than those articles covering female victims and women’s issues. A major exception is that language resulting in dichotomous innocent/villainous constructions were used to describe victims and perpetrators regardless of their sex or gender - as discussed above. This lack of discrimination in naming or describing victims and perpetrators was offset, however, by discriminatory use of terms “domestic violence”, “domestic abuse” and “domestic assault” to describe incidents perpetrated by males but not by females. Rather, most articles reporting female perpetrated incidents employed the terms “physical assault” or “assault”. Rarely is the term “domestic” present in these articles. This language choice changes the context of the incident, and subtly alters its very meaning of the situation.

In the Star and the Sun, a total of 63 and 114 articles or 83% and 91% of articles in which the victim was female characterize the incident as “domestic violence”, “domestic abuse” and/or “domestic assault”. For example, in a 1995 Star article entitled

“Boyfriend Jailed in Stomping Death”, the perpetrator is described as having punched his girlfriend in the head after a confrontation with her about an alleged affair she was having. When she fell to the floor, he repeatedly stomped on her until she succumbed to unconsciousness. The incident was referred to as domestic violence and prompted the assertion that “the killing of Carrie Mann was the ultimate form of *domestic assault*”. Similarly, in another Star article published in 1999 “Sympathetic Judge Gives Wife-Killer 18 Months”, a man who shot his wife to death after catching her in bed with her lover was given a “lenient” sentence according to many who work with battered women. Although there was no previous history of domestic violence in the relationship, the case was characterized as such an incident rather than murder, and many feminist and women’s advocates reportedly felt that the case “exploded the myth that there is justice for *domestic violence* victims” (Associated Press 1994). This reference to male-to-female violence as “domestic violence”, “domestic abuse”, and/or “domestic assault” is further demonstrated in other articles published in the Star. Among these are “Husbands Get Away With Murder”, “Strangled His Wife, Man Gets Life Term” and “Whitby Man Sentenced to Life”.

Similarly, articles regarding male-to-female violence published in the Sun; “Life Term Sought in Stabbing”, “Man Jailed Six Months for Stabbing Wife”, “Man Jailed for Fatal Beating” and “Man Attempted to Immolate Wife” also utilize the terms “domestic abuse”, “domestic assault” and “domestic violence”. For example, in the article “Man Jailed Six Months for Stabbing Wife”, the perpetrator, who believed his wife was going to leave him, stabbed her after an argument between the couple. The incident is referred

to as “a malicious domestic violence incident”, as opposed to assault with a weapon.

In contrast, when reporting on female-to-male violence, 14 or 54% of articles in both the Star and the Sun, use “physical assault” or “assault” rather than “domestic”. This is evident in the Star’s articles “Wife Cut off Man’s Penis in Jealous Rage, Jury Told” and “Battering is in Eyes of Beholder”, and the Sun’s articles “A Most Inappropriate Martyr”, “Hubby Stands by Attacker, Wife Slices Scrotum”, “Hubby Poisoner Gets Break” and “Behind Bars for Moment of Rage”. In the 1992 Star article “Wife Cut off Man’s Penis in Jealous Rage, Jury Told”, a woman who cut off her husband’s penis while he was asleep in their bedroom because she “felt he was cheating” was charged with “assault with a deadly weapon causing bodily harm”. Further, the woman is described as having had “a moment of jealous rage resulting in the *physical assault*”.

This pattern is replicated in the Sun. In a 1998 article published in the Sun entitled “Hubby Stands by Attacker, Wife Slices Scrotum”, a woman who slashed her husband’s scrotum with a knife during a fight in their bedroom, was charged with “*assault* causing bodily harm following the August 1997 incident at the couple’s apartment”. Again, much like the article published in the Star, although the incident is violent and took place between a man and a woman in an intimate or conjugal relationship no mention of “domestic violence”, “domestic abuse” or “domestic assault” is made.

As noted above, the Sun published more articles on male victims than did the Star, and was more likely than the Star to use the term “domestic” when describing these

incidents, though not significantly more. As stated previously, of the 144 articles published in the Sun on incidents of domestic violence, 13% indicated a female perpetrated incident, compared to the Star which devoted 8% of 83 articles to female aggressors. Of the seven articles regarding female perpetrated violence published in the Star, three utilized the term “domestic” when referring to the incident (43%). In contrast, of the 19 articles published in the Sun regarding female perpetrated violence, nine utilized the term “domestic” (47%). Across the two papers, that is less than half of all female perpetrated incidents are described as “domestic” while 78% of male perpetrated incidents are described using this term.

Examples of articles published in the Sun that employ the term “domestic” to describe female perpetrated violence include “Alcoholic Spouse Strangled Hubby”, “Husband-Stabber Gets Two Years Probation”, “Brit Men Abused by Wives” and “Husband set on fire for Eating Wife’s Bunny” all utilize the term “domestic” to refer to the incident. Specifically, in the article “Husband set on fire for Eating Wife’s Bunny”, where the perpetrator doused her husband in gasoline while he slept in an armchair, and then set him ablaze, the incident is described by police and family violence workers “as a bizarre case of *domestic violence*”. Examples from the Star include “Man Cleared of Murder of his Abusive Wife” and “Wife Sets Husband Alight for Eating Easter Bunny”. Specifically, in the article “Man Cleared of Murder of his Abusive Wife”, where a man was charged with the murder of his wife following an earlier altercation. The man was cleared of murder charges after a court found he had been the “victim of extensive and cruel *domestic violence* for years”.

I will return to this finding on the use of language in the final chapter of the thesis. The difference in the utilization of language to describe male domestic violence victimization as opposed to female domestic violence victimization supports my hypothesis that social constructions of domestic violence are “gendered.” This finding is interesting and unexpected. Further study on language in domestic violence media representations is needed.

Despite differences in the tendencies of these newspapers to report or not report on male domestic violence victimization and to employ “domestic violence” terminology when referring to these, it must be remembered that very few articles focused upon female-to-male violence in either of the newspapers. It is impossible to determine from this study that a reference to “physical assault” as opposed to “domestic abuse” when the victim is male is a common practice in other Canadian newspapers since only the Star and the Sun were sampled. It is worth noting that in official statistics such as the ones produced by Statistics Canada, both male and female perpetrated incidents of violence in intimate relationships are classified as “domestic”. It should also be noted, however, that the lack of the “domestic” characterization may not be the fault of the journalists. When an incident of violence is reported the police or other organizations or institutions that the newspaper rely upon for information may not characterize the incident as “domestic” in their report and, consequently, the newspaper does not report it as such. Of course, the failure to employ “domestic” when reporting female-to-male violence may have been affected by the use of the term “domestic” in searching for articles. Many of the articles containing such incidents may have been overlooked since they did not meet the outlined

requirements stated in the Methodology chapter, and therefore did not appear when the initial search of the newspapers' databases were performed. However, the objective of this research project is to explore the construction of domestic violence in Ontario newsprint media, and to examine the constructions of gender in these discourses. Therefore, altering the search of the databases to include incidents of violence that are characterized using terms other than the ones listed in the Appendices, would have altered the purpose and possibly the validity of this study. Since the newspapers failed to utilize "domestic" when reporting on female-to-male violence, these articles do not appear in the database search and subsequently are not considered for this project. This difference in the characterization, and the application of language to describe incidents and issues of violence based on whether the victim is male or female, supports the hypothesis that the Ontario newsprint media as sampled in the Star and the Sun construct domestic violence incidents, issues, and victims differently based on the gender of the perpetrator. On the other hand, all the incidents covered in this paper were located using various search phrases aimed at capturing domestic violence or battering listed in the Appendices, and all are clearly incidents of violence between intimate partners. This would be clear to any reader.

National Versus Local Coverage:

Both the Star and the Sun included national as well as local articles regarding domestic violence incidents and issues. For the purposes of the current research project, "local coverage" refers to articles published in both newspapers regarding issues and incidents

of domestic violence that occur within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and the surrounding regional areas, which extends north from Richmond Hill to Barrie, west to Orangeville, and includes Mississauga, Hamilton and Whitby. “National coverage” refers to those articles regarding issues and incidents of domestic violence that occur outside of the regions described previously in the construct of local coverage.

There are more national articles on domestic violence in both the Star and the Sun than there are local ones. Of the 225 articles published in the Star, 47 were of local coverage, while 178 articles provided national coverage. This indicates that 79% of the articles published in the Star on domestic violence were national, while only 21% provided local coverage. Similarly, in the Sun, of the 257 articles published on domestic violence, 43 or 17 % provided local coverage compared to 214 or 83% providing national coverage. In the discussion about domestic violence, the most frequent topic debated was the funding for shelters and domestic violence programs. The second most frequently discussed topic about domestic violence was legislation and policy making. Most of the articles were in favour of more funding, and a change in legislation.

Although there is considerable attention directed to local shelters, advocacy groups, and funding, the majority of articles in both newspapers concern national policy, legislation, law, and trends on domestic violence. In addition, domestic violence cases that made national news were more likely to be followed up, since these were usually the most sensational. For example, “minor” domestic assault is the most likely type of domestic violence covered in original reports, but it is the least likely to be followed up in subsequent articles. This is most likely due in part to the perceived “harmless nature”

of the offence and the relatively “speedy” manner in which it was dealt with. Although offenders may go through a trial, or be subject to a lengthy court battle, interest wanes quickly. This is illustrated in the Sun article “Not Just Another Kick in the Pants” where a woman kicked an adolescent in the groin for his “inappropriate” comments. Although this incident sparked a debate about appropriate responses by individuals based on gender, it was short lived. The Sun published additional articles pertaining to the “kick in the pants” incident in which journalists conveyed their opinion on the incident and the appropriate, if any, response to the matter. However, these subsequent articles appeared within a day of the original report, and no other follow up articles were published.

In contrast, extremely horrific incidents of domestic violence in which the victim was brutally injured or murdered were more likely to be followed up since the urgency of finding an offender for prosecution was more likely than for a case involving a simple slap on the cheek. For example, in the Star, Phillip Mascoll follows up his original report of March 9, 1991, “Man Gets Life Term for Murdering Wife”, with an article on March 14, 1991 entitled “Whitby Man Sentenced to Life”. Similarly, in the Sun, an original report entitled “Toddler Found Walking Streets After Parents’ Murder-Suicide”, appeared December 3, 1991, and was followed up December 4, 1991 with “Toddlers Watched Dad Shoot Mom, Then Kill Self”.

Newspapers tend to report more stories involving murders, and domestic violence incidents that include serious injury to the victim, and the use of a weapon(s). Since murders and serious domestic violence cases are processed through the criminal justice system, the story is a national one. The incident is followed from the original report to

the outcome of the trial by the newspapers. Therefore, more articles appear in the newspaper concerning one particular case, which is on a national level, and subsequently the newspaper devotes more space to national than local coverage.

Death was the most reported type of injury in the newspaper articles, even though, according to statistics from Statistics Canada, murder is the smallest category of offence type, while minor assault without injury is by far the leading domestic violence offence. Therefore, cases of domestic violence involving murder were the most likely to be followed up. This “over-reporting” of death may be due in part to the fact that murder is seen as the ultimate form of victimization, and domestic violence resulting in serious injury are perceived to be reported more often than minor incidents involving injuries (see discussion re: over-reporting in Reiner 2002). Thus, most articles published in the two newspapers regarding incidents of domestic violence reported death or serious injury.

Both the Star and the Sun articles over-report the proportions of male versus female perpetrated murders of intimate partners. According to the 2000 Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile report (Bunge 2000), over a ten year period beginning in 1990, and ending in 1999, 77% of domestic homicides were committed by men against their female partner, while 23% of domestic homicides were committed by women against their male partner (Bunge 2000:40). Variations on this pattern emerge when articles regarding death as the result of domestic violence were published in the Star and the Sun over the same ten year period. The Star published 12 articles regarding male perpetrated domestic homicide, and 3 articles regarding female perpetrated domestic

homicide, resulting in a modest over-representation of male perpetrators. In contrast, the Sun published 24 articles regarding male perpetrated domestic homicide, and 10 articles regarding female perpetrated domestic homicide, in which female perpetrators are dramatically over-represented.

As noted previously, the Sun reported on far more domestic homicides than did the Star, and over-reported domestic homicides by women; 29% versus the 23% captured in official statistics (Bunge 2000). In contrast, the Star reported on far fewer incidents and over-reported domestic homicides by men, though not to the same extent; 80% versus 77% captured in official statistics (Bunge 2000). Also as stated previously, since cases of domestic violence resulting in serious injury or death are invariably dealt with in the criminal justice system, they are most likely to be national stories. Therefore, the majority of the articles presented in each newspaper represent national stories and not local ones. This helps account for the disparity between national and local coverage in the two newspapers.

In addition to reporting on domestic violence incidents and policy issues, both the Star and the Sun report on domestic violence research, including surveys conducted by Statistics Canada - the 1993 Violence Against Women Survey, and the 1999 General Social Survey. Each newspaper published articles directly related to the findings of the surveys conducted by Statistics Canada. There were few initial reports covering the research conducted by Statistics Canada, however, there were several follow up articles published in both newspapers reporting responses to the findings of the two studies. As well, many reports in the two newspapers draw upon statistics from both the 1993

Violence Against Women Survey, and the 1999 General Social Survey, citing the findings of these surveys as evidence to support various groups' claims.

As discussed throughout this chapter, newsprint media articles sampled in this study characteristically report female victimization and male perpetration. This finding is logical since domestic violence is revealed to the media by official information sources, primarily law enforcement agencies, government agencies or services funded by governments, as for example hospitals. In addition, information is provided by political officials, political advocates, researchers and research groups. These media informants provide information to the majority of all newspaper articles involving domestic violence incidents and issues. The results of this current research project confirm that the newsprint media's primary sources are various officials, such as police officers, shelter workers, hospital staff, women's organizations and government representatives. These sources provide their version of reality and values through the newspapers.

The newspaper reports about domestic violence incidents and issues were consistent with police and hospital reports and sources, and consistent with the General Social Survey on fear/terror and fearfulness. This is predictable since the newsprint media gathers most of its information from official sources like the police and hospital staff. Therefore, the majority of incidents reported involve female victims and male perpetrators. It is these cases that are more likely to come to the attention of officials, and they are subsequently relayed through the newsprint media outlets to the public.

Findings Summary:

The Star and the Sun depict victims as innocent and perpetrators as monstrous, regardless of their sex or gender. This pattern is evident throughout the articles published in both newspapers. This finding indicates that constructions of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence are not determined by gender stereotypes of victim and perpetrator roles. At the same time, more than half of the articles on female perpetrated domestic violence published in the Star and the Sun did not use the term “domestic”, 47% in the Star and 43% in the Sun. In contrast, the omission of the word “domestic” occurred in 6% of the cases in which the victim was female. As discussed early in this chapter, this omission of the term “domestic” does not just change the meaning of the incident; it also alters the relevance of gender to violence. The fact that journalists apparently “shy away” from utilizing “domestic” when reporting on female perpetrated incidents indicates, at least on the surface, that there is a reluctance to define the incident as domestic violence when the victim is male. This suggests that there is an implicit gendered definition of domestic violence incidents, victims and perpetrators in the newsprint media.

According to official reports, domestic violence rates have decreased over the decade of the 1990s. This is among the “facts” reported in the articles sampled in this study. At the same time, the proportion of reported domestic assault incidents, in relation to violent incidents across categories, has remained relatively stable, as have gender ratios in domestic homicide charges. This is to say, domestic violence incidents account for a small and stable proportion of all violent crimes, less than a fifth.

Moreover, less than a fifth of these incidents involve male victims. These “facts” are also reported in the media articles sampled in this study, in reports on Statistics Canada releases in both papers.

Although domestic violence clearly has negative social impacts, statistic evidence suggests that it is rhetoric, not empirical fact that defines domestic abuse as an epidemic. Similarly, it is rhetoric that defines males as invisible victims of this epidemic. Male victims are in evidence in police reports, in surveys and in news media accounts and commentary, though the attention and interpretation given to these facts vary by the political slant of the two papers. Domestic violence generally and domestic violence against males in particular are arguably undercounted or reported. Nevertheless, reported trends in official statistics and surveys provide insight into the nature and distribution of domestic assaults, victims and offenders.

Official reports and surveys suggest that while both men and women experience victimization, the nature and consequences vary significantly by gender. Serious violence, up to and including murder, is perpetrated against and by both genders, but clearly not in equal proportions. Men are significantly less likely to be seriously victimized or killed, and men exhibit significantly less fear. On the other hand, men as well as women do experience the worst forms of victimization. Newspaper reports confirm both the relative rarity and the existence of serious domestic violence against males to the general population.

For years, gender has been a central focus of domestic violence discourse and argument. Since the “second wave” of feminism, there has been a conscious effort to

combat sexism, and subsequently domestic violence against women. This may explain why domestic assault cases involving female victims have decreased significantly over the decade of the 1990s - a decrease captured in police reported crimes and in victimization surveys conducted by Statistics Canada in 1993 and 1999 (Bunge 2000). As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, violence against women is socially less acceptable than it was prior to the onset of feminist violence against women activism, and it appears to occur less frequently than in the past.

Over the decade of the 1990s, men's rights advocates have sought to define violence against men at the hands of women as a problem of comparable social seriousness and concern. This was a hotly debated issue over the decade of the 1990s, as evidenced in the articles sampled for this study. Across the two papers, there is a general consensus that violence against women is wrong. The same consensus is not apparent on the issue of male victims. Rather, the papers took opposing views. The Star provided minimal coverage to reports of male victimization, and criticized men's advocates who sought to mobilize action to deal with this problem. The Sun maximized reports of male victimization, and championed the men's rights "men are victims too" cause.

Rather than being rendered invisible in the media, the issue of male victimization is a continuing issue of conflict and controversy. This is evidenced in reports and commentary on domestic violence across the two papers, the Star and the Sun.

Conclusion - Chapter Five

Domestic violence is a controversial topic that is both horrifying and confusing. Victims of domestic violence are injured, sometimes seriously, and are possibly tortured, or even killed. The newsprint media reports on domestic violence, relaying incidents and issues to the general population. To achieve this, the newsprint media expresses the concerns and views of the primary claims-makers related to domestic violence. These claims-makers include the government, police officers, law enforcement agencies, shelter groups, men's rights activists, feminists, various women's advocates, and also academic and government researchers. The newsprint media is not objective when communicating the ideology of these primary claims-makers. Their claims are deciphered and processed to meet the technical format of the medium, and the political and social biases of media owners, editors, journalists and audiences. The newsprint media itself acts as a secondary claims-maker (Reiner 2002).

This chapter summarizes and comments upon this secondary claims-making activity. It is consequently both a reflection upon the discourses and findings discussed throughout the thesis, and a discussion of the ways findings do and do not fit with the contending arguments on domestic violence and gender advanced in feminist, men's rights, government and academic discourses, as outlined in the Literature Review chapter.

As stated in the Introduction, my motivation for conducting the research project is rooted in a concern over what I perceive as a lack of attention to male victims of

domestic violence in popular and academic discourses. This concern or bias coincides with my tendency to “side” with men’s rights activists, who I perceive as marginalised due to the dominance of feminist constructions in the domestic violence arena (Tierney 1983; Dobash and Dobash 1988, 1992, 1998; Farrell 1993; Miller and Sharif 1995; Pearson 1997; Messner 1998). This is salient to my working hypothesis that the print media would under-represent male domestic violence victimization, and that it would promote policy focussed exclusively or near-exclusively on female victimization. I further hypothesized that newsprint media would, across the two media sources, the Star and the Sun, draw upon and reproduce gender stereotypes that render male victimization “invisible”.

As also stated in my Introductory chapter, it is not possible to remain completely “objective” when conducting research on controversial social issues, especially when research relies on content analysis. It is important, however, to acknowledge biases, and work to avoid allowing these to dominate, remembering that as a social constructionist my task is not to verify hypotheses or discount “realities”, but to explore how domestic violence and gender are constructed in the contending and overlapping social arenas examined in my research. These arenas are reports and commentary on domestic violence incidents and policy in two Toronto newspapers, the Star and the Sun, over the decade of the 1990s. Although my working hypotheses or hunches on what these media sources would accomplish in their constructions of domestic violence and gender cannot, in the strict positivist sense of the term, be “tested” through qualitative content analysis, such an analysis can provide, or fail to provide, support for my “concern” that the media

are biased against male victims. As demonstrated in the discussion that follows, there is support for this hypothesis, but this support is mixed, and in many respects contradictory.

Given the constructionist theoretical stance adopted for this project, it is equally important to acknowledge the biases of the media sources that I examine. As stated in the Literature Review and Findings chapters, there are implicit and characteristically unstated opinions and hidden agendas behind reports and commentary on domestic violence incidents and policy, as is also often the case in government, academic and activist discourses on domestic violence, men's rights activism, and gender. In my research with the Star and the Sun, interpretation, mine or the author's, dramatically shapes the slant or meaning of the events described (Denzin 1990). For example, as discussed in the Findings chapter, both the Star and the Sun exhibit an obvious political slant, as illustrated in articles that reflect a pro-feminist or pro-men's rights bias. These biases are among a variety of reasons it is imperative that I refrain from temptations to attempt to uncover what is "true". Neither my theoretical orientation, social constructionism (Blumer 1971; Gusfield 1984; Best 1993), nor my methodology, content analysis (Neuman 2000), provides the necessary tools for such a task.

This study has addressed more than just the number of articles concerning domestic violence incidents and policy that were published in the two newspapers together or in each newspaper individually. An analysis of the content of the articles, and their headlines, demonstrates considerable similarity among the 482 articles analyzed, and also striking differences consistent with the apparent left versus right political biases of the papers. Both the headlines and the articles purport to express the

simple facts of the events. There is notable, but at first glance insignificant, difference between the Star's and the Sun's headline and article content, as in both papers articles on female victims and policy relevant to female victimization are more prevalent than are articles on male victims and policy issues relevant to male victimization. This is predictable given the extent to which both papers rely upon official sources which act as the primary claims-makers. However, the political stance of the newspaper influenced the amount of coverage given to the submerged theme of male victimization, reflecting the predominance of female victimization in the official reports upon which both media sources rely.

This study highlights several factors that affect how claims are processed. The research shows that not all domestic violence incidents and issues are reported the same way across the two media outlets. It shows that the gender of identified victims and perpetrators is influenced by the official and non-official data sources from which the papers obtain their "news", and by the political stances of the newspapers themselves. In addition, both papers focus more on national as opposed to local events. This contributes to the over-representation of more serious and sensational cases. Finally, the language employed both in incident reporting and in commentary on policy affects the quality and meanings of these incidents and policies to readers. In particular, these factors impact upon the relevance of gender to domestic violence as a special and categorical classification of criminal assault. This in turn, impacts upon readers' perceptions on and experiences of gender itself, which as discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review, is a labile socially constructed process, not a static reality or

attribute.

To reiterate, this thesis focuses upon the gender of identified victims and offenders in reports on domestic violence incidents and policy with the aim of exploring how gender is constructed reproduced and transformed in and through newsprint media attention to domestic violence victimization by males and females respectively. The sample of articles is 225 for the Star and 257 for the Sun, for a total of 482 incident based and policy-oriented articles. Numerically, the Toronto Sun devotes more space to domestic violence incidents and issues than does the Toronto Star. This observation is based on the sheer difference in the raw number of articles devoted to domestic violence incidents and issues in the two newspapers. Fifty three percent of the sample articles are derived from the Sun, compared to 47% from the Star. This difference is particularly significant when the larger size of the Star is taken into consideration. As stated in the Findings chapter, taking May 14, 2003 as an indicator, the Star provides 89 pages measuring approximately 44 pages to news and commentary, and the Sun provides 72 pages measuring approximately 39 pages. The Sun, compared to the Star, provides significantly more coverage to domestic violence issues, proportional to all issues reported and commented upon, than does the Star.

Analysis of the articles from the two newspapers demonstrates that both newspapers dedicate a significantly larger amount of space to domestic violence incidents and issues that involve female as opposed to male victims. Combined, the papers devote 89% of incident reports to female victimization. In policy reports, a full 44% leave the gender of victims unidentified, while 49% identify victims as female and

7% identify victims as male. These gendered patterns are not surprising, however, considering the proportions of female versus male victims of domestic violence as reported in official statistics. Overall, journalists in both papers are less likely to identify male victims as victims of domestic violence, although as discussed in the Findings chapter, males were more likely to be identified as domestic violence victims in the Sun than in the Star.

A primary finding is that while both papers report more female victimization and policy concerns, they do not provide consistent coverage of male versus female victimization, or even of domestic violence incidents and issues generally. Rather, the papers vary in how much attention they devote to male versus female victimization. While both papers report more on female than male victimization, neither paper's reports "accurately" reflect the "gendered realities" of domestic violence that are captured in official statistics. Rather, each paper provides a moderately "distorted" and opposing portrait. Consequently, global generalizations cannot be made about the newsprint media's constructions of domestic violence and gender based solely on the proportion of articles that identify male versus female victims across the two newspapers.

The Star's and the Sun's disparate reporting patterns coincide with reports and commentary that advance the rhetoric of feminists versus men's rights claims-makers. As discussed in the Findings chapter, the Star, which leans to the political left, is a more pro-feminist paper, while the Sun, which leans to the political right, is more pro-men's rights. It is therefore not surprising that the Sun contained more articles regarding male victims of domestic violence and that it advanced and provided more commentary upon

policy issues as these pertain to male victims. This is salient to the finding that the Sun over-represented female perpetrated domestic homicides, assuming these are accurately captured in official statistics (Fitzgerald 1999; Bunge 2000; Trainor 2002). In contrast, the Star over-reported male perpetrated domestic homicide, again assuming these are accurately captured in official statistics (Fitzgerald 1999; Bunge 2000, Trainor 2002).

As these observations suggest, counts of incidents alone do not provide strong support for my working hypothesis that newsprint media globally or universally minimize and downplay domestic victimization of men. Rather, the two media sources sampled in this study clearly exhibit varying and disparate patterns and biases. More research is needed to determine which other papers, across Canada, “accurately” report, under report, and over report domestic victimization by men, using police or official statistics on domestic assaults and homicides as the baseline for what is “accurate”. Future research also needs to address the extent to which reporting biases, or lack thereof, fit with other positions on policy issues advanced in Canadian newsprint media, especially positions consistent with pro-feminist versus pro-men’s rights positions on various social issues.

A second source of bias in the newsprint media’s reports on domestic violence incidents and policy, relevant to the social construction of domestic violence and of gender, is the focus across the two papers on national versus local coverage. Domestic violence incidents and issues occurring nationally receive more coverage than those occurring locally, 81% versus 19%. This national coverage is more diverse, and more in-depth, than is its local counterpart. Both newspapers focus heavily on national issues

such as funding for shelters, legislative changes and initiatives for new programs. While these issues were also local, such as the debate over funding for shelters in North York, many policy-oriented reports addressed national developments.

As discussed in the Findings chapter, a focus on sensational or newsworthy incidents that occur anywhere in Canada results in both papers over-focusing on serious and sensational domestic violence cases. The focus here is on incidents that involve serious injury or death. As discussed in the Findings chapter these types of incidents usually go to trial, as opposed to being resolved through a plea bargain or a dropped charge, and are therefore of greater interest. Moreover, many of these articles are subsequently followed up, explaining some of the difference in the volume of national and local articles. Regardless of whether the incident occurred locally, or whether it captured national media attention, across the two papers domestic violence incidents involving severe injury and/or murder, and incidents involving the use of weapons were far more heavily reported than were minor assaults. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, the media over-reports serious incidents because these are deemed newsworthy (Reiner 2002). It is important to bear in mind that the over-reporting of serious domestic violence incidents is not unique to the problem or phenomenon of domestic violence, as this is true generally of reporting of crime in the media.

With respect to my working hypothesis that the newsprint media globally under report male victimization, across papers the primary focus is on serious and lethal domestic violence incidents. These are incidents in which female victims are most likely to be over-represented in official statistics. Consequently, the over-reporting of serious

incidents in itself results in a bias against media recognition of male victimization, since males are most commonly (to a greater extent than women) the victims of more minor police reported domestic assaults (Bunge 2000). At the same time, differences in reports of serious and especially lethal victimization of males are striking in the two newspapers. The overall effect, nevertheless, is a construction of domestic violence victimization as an overwhelmingly female experience. It is in reports of domestic homicides that this is most evident, especially in the Star's reports which moderately over-report the murder of female partners, as discussed in the Findings chapter.

In both the above media reporting biases, the propensity of newspapers to over or under report male domestic violence victimization in ways that fit with the general political stance of the paper, and the near exclusive focus on national level and serious or sensational incidents, carry the implicit and untenable assumption that official statistics accurately capture the "reality" of domestic violence assaults and homicides, and the relevance of gender to these phenomena. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter, it is not clear that homicides and assaults are accurately classified in official statistics, whether minor or severe. Clearly, much minor domestic violence goes unreported, whether against women or men (Bunge 2000). Moreover, some homicides remain unsolved, and the perpetrator or suspected perpetrator unidentified.

Neither unreported incidents of domestic assault or unidentified domestic assault nor unidentified domestic homicides appear in police reports or official statistics. Consequently these do not appear as "domestic" assaults or homicides in Canadian newspapers. Moreover, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter, and in the

Findings chapter, police statistics, hospital reports, and the like are not the sole source of public information on domestic violence in Canada. Social surveys, especially the 1993 Violence Against Women survey and the 1999 General Social Survey, provide compelling evidence on the nature and extent of domestic violence and on the relevance of gender victimization. Both surveys document serious victimization of women in Canada, while the second survey documents a degree of “gender parity” in domestic violence perpetration, but only in the perpetration of minor assaults. Men’s rights advocates and feminists both draw upon these and other survey data, as noted in both the Literature Review and the Findings chapters, each focusing on different details and issues, and each interpreting these to fit with the theoretical or ideological biases of men’s rights advocacy and feminist advocacy respectively. The political biases of the two papers coincide with these opposing positions, as noted repeatedly in this thesis. Consequently, survey findings contribute to the social constructions of domestic violence and of gender in the two media sources, but overall each paper uses these findings to reinforce its pro-feminist or pro-men’s rights stance.

It is important to emphasize that the reading audience is not receiving an accurate reflection of official data on domestic assaults and homicides, even though both media sources (or even all media sources) rely heavily upon police reports and other official sources of information when constructing crime news (Reiner 2002). The media as claims-makers, albeit secondary, purport to want to provide the public with accurate information on domestic violence and other crime phenomena. Since more people read the newspapers than read Statistics Canada reports, the construction of domestic violence

in the newspapers is particularly important. If the newsprint media is to live up to its ideal of “reporting facts” (Reiner 2002), newspapers must carefully consider the kinds of information about domestic violence incidents and issues that they report and comment upon. Rather than focusing so exclusively on what sells, or at the very least, on what is newsworthy, the media should, by their own standards, engage in more responsible and “accurate” reporting. This means that when reporting and commenting upon sensational incidents, the media needs to place these into context. The media needs to remind readers of how rare or common the incident reported upon actually is, as measured in and by official statistics and survey findings.

These observations on the responsibilities of the newsprint media aside, a primary finding of this study is that, contrary to my working hypothesis, domestic violence and consequently gender are constructed in competing ways in the two newspapers. In both instances, domestic violence and gender are constructed, not through simple reporting of “the facts”, but through selective reporting and selective, politically biased, interpretation and commentary. The conclusion that the newsprint media provides fractured rather than consistent constructions of domestic violence and therefore of gender must be qualified, however, to take into account the language utilized by journalists in the two newspapers. In both the Star and the Sun, the language of reporting and commentary constructs both domestic violence and gender in ways that support prevailing stereotypes and/or feminist constructions of these social processes. Even in the pro-men’s rights Sun, the language employed in describing 47% of female perpetrated domestic violence incidents imply that, by definition, only male perpetrated acts count or qualify as domestic violence,

whereas a full 91% of male perpetrated incidents rhetorically count as “domestics”. As evidenced in both the Star and the Sun, domestic assaults against women and men are characterized differently based upon the gender of the victim, even though victims are characterized as innocent across genders, and perpetrators as cruel or evil across genders.

This differentiation in the choice of terminology to describe male and female victimization supports my working hypothesis that there is gender bias in the newsprint media’s constructions of domestic violence incidents and issues. The language employed in the articles shapes the meaning and the message across the two newspapers. When female victims are involved, language is employed differently than when the victim is male, at least in the strict sense of whether “domestic” is employed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the gendered constructions of domestic violence in Ontario newsprint media, and to examine the ways gender is constructed through these discourses. The examination of the social construction of gender, and how it shapes the perception of domestic violence and its victims in the newsprint media is important because of the newsprint media’s strong influence on public opinions, behaviours, and self perceptions. The reporting on domestic violence incidents and discussions on legislation concerning this topic have played a major role in bringing this social issue to the forefront of public awareness and social policy.

The newsprint media, in recent years, has devoted a great deal of space to the issues surrounding domestic violence, its victims and various initiatives put forth to combat this problem. The newspapers sampled in this study have not been objective in this regard. The Star has over emphasized female victimization, and played down male

victimization. In contrast, the Sun has promoted the notion that men are victims especially of lethal violence to a far greater degree than they are recognized for. At the same time, the Sun has promoted the view that male victimization is an important social policy and that failing to recognize this is injustice to men, equivalent to the Nazi's treatment of Jews during WWII. These characterizations are important to the non-static nature of gender, and to changing gender roles in contemporary North American society (West and Zimmerman 1987; Messner 1998; Hartmann 2000).

It is important to note that, despite major similarities in reports and language, the Star and the Sun operate as opposing sites for constructing not only the problem of domestic violence, but also for contesting the inevitably changing realities of gender in contemporary Canadian society. Both have a robust readership, as discussed in the Findings chapter. By implication, in the case of the Sun, this readership is sympathetic to claims that men are true victims, not only of domestic violence, but of false or distorted societal stereotypes of males as the violent gender. In the case of the Star, however, which has an even more robust readership, readers are by implication more sympathetic to feminist constructions of domestic violence, and to feminist claims that men's rights arguments are for the most part reactionary backlash against the "truths" about domestic violence and gender inequality revealed by feminism.

As noted several times throughout this thesis, in both the Star and the Sun reports and commentary were concentrated primarily upon domestic violence incidents and issues relevant to female victimization. This results in a construction of women as the victimized gender, even in the Sun. This is to say, the two newspapers exhibited not only

noteworthy differences, but also important similarities in their reports on domestic violence incidents and issues. Each newspaper, regardless of its political stance, focused less attention on male victims or men's issues. In addition, both newspapers focused a great deal of attention upon incidents of domestic violence that resulted in severe injury, or death, not because these types of offences are the most typical or common type of domestic violence, but because these are the most newsworthy. Finally, both papers were less likely to define victimization of men by domestic partners as "domestic violence", suggesting that at either a conscious or perhaps at a subconscious level, this term only applies when women are victims.

Claims in men's rights literature that domestic violence perpetration by women is unthinkable (Farrell 1993; Pearson 1997) are not supported by this study, since men do appear as victims and since the Sun actually over reported male victimization, again assuming that official statistics provide an "accurate" or nearly accurate measure of domestic victimization. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes are generally supported across the two papers - especially gender stereotypes that define females as the predominate or perhaps even "true" domestic violence victims - evidenced most strikingly in the language used to describe domestic assault incidents in the two newspapers.

This study has added to the overall understanding of how the newsprint media construct domestic violence, and the ways gender norms are and are not reproduced and challenged in this endeavour. These considerations require future research. This thesis helps provide direction to this effort. It is obviously impossible to infer that all media sources portray domestic violence and gender identically based upon the study of two

Toronto area papers. Further examination of constructions of domestic violence and gender in the newsprint media will need to sample newspapers from different cities in Ontario, as well as other provinces and even the United States. It is my hope that the results of this research project provides a basis on which to build.

APPENDIX A

Terms Used for Keyword Search With Both Toronto Star and Toronto Sun

Keyword(s)

Domestic Violence

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Assault

Battered Women

Battered Men

Battered Male

Battered Female

Battered Males

Battered Females

Battered Spouse(s)

Abusive Men

Abusive Women

Abusive Male(s)

Abusive Female(s)

Abusive Husband(s)

Abusive Wife(ves)

Abusive Spouse(s)

Abused Spouse(s)

Abused Women

Abused Men

Abused Female(s)

Abused Male(s)

Abused Wife(ves)

Abused Husband(s)

Battering Spouse(s)

Battering Men

Battering Women

Battering Female(s)

Battering Male(s)

Battering Husband(s)

Battering Wife(ves)

Battering

Battered Woman's Syndrome

Battered Man's Syndrome

The Conflict Tactics Scale

Violence Against Females

Violence Against Males

Violence Against Husbands

Violence Against Wives

Violence Against Spouses

Violence Against Men

Male Assault

Female Assault

Wife Assault

Husband Assault

Spousal Assault

Wife Abuse

Husband Abuse

Spousal Abuse

Female Abuse

Male Abuse

Family Violence

Spousal Violence

Violent Spouse(s)

APPENDIX B
Keyword Search Results - The Toronto Star

Keyword(s)	Number of Articles Found
Domestic Violence	234 Documents
Domestic Abuse	49 Documents
Domestic Assault	29 Documents
Battered Women	152 Documents
Battered Men	0 Documents
Battered Male	0 Documents
Battered Female	0 Documents
Battered Males	0 Documents
Battered Females	0 Documents
Battered Spouse(s)	0 Documents
Abusive Men	3 Documents
Abusive Women	0 Documents
Abusive Male(s)	0 Documents
Abusive Female(s)	0 Documents
Abusive Husband(s)	6 Documents
Abusive Wife(ves)	1 Document
Abusive Spouse(s)	1 Document
Abused Spouse(s)	0 Documents
Abused Women	43 Documents
Abused Men	3 Documents
Abused Female(s)	0 Documents
Abused Male(s)	3 Documents
Abused Wife(ves)	4 Documents
Abused Husband(s)	0 Documents
Battering Spouse(s)	0 Documents
Battering Men	0 Documents
Battering Women	0 Documents
Battering Female(s)	0 Documents
Battering Male(s)	0 Documents
Battering Husband(s)	0 Documents
Battering Wife(ves)	0 Documents
Battering	138 Documents
Battered Woman's Syndrome	0 Documents
Battered Man's Syndrome	0 Documents
The Conflict Tactics Scale	0 Documents
Violence Against Females	0 Documents
Violence Against Males	0 Documents
Violence Against Husbands	0 Documents

Violence Against Wives	43 Documents
Violence Against Spouses	0 Documents
Violence Against Women	56 Documents
Violence Against Men	1 Document
Violent Spouse(s)	1 Document
Male Assault	0 Documents
Female Assault	0 Documents
Wife Assault	45 Documents
Husband Assault	0 Documents
Spousal Assault	14 Documents
Wife Abuse	56 Documents
Husband Abuse	1 Document
Spousal Abuse	101 Documents
Female Abuse	0 Documents
Male Abuse	0 Documents
Family Violence	75 Documents
Spousal Violence	4 Documents
Total Number of Articles Found	1063 Documents

APPENDIX C
Keyword Search Results - The Toronto Sun

Keyword(s)	Number of Articles Found
Domestic Violence	256 Documents
Domestic Abuse	37 Documents
Domestic Assault	44 Documents
Battered Women	134 Documents
Battered Men	0 Documents
Battered Male	0 Documents
Battered Female	0 Documents
Battered Males	0 Documents
Battered Females	0 Documents
Battered Spouse(s)	0 Documents
Abusive Men	7 Documents
Abusive Women	0 Documents
Abusive Male(s)	0 Documents
Abusive Female(s)	0 Documents
Abusive Husband(s)	3 Documents
Abusive Wife(ves)	0 Document
Abusive Spouse(s)	2 Document
Abused Spouse(s)	0 Documents
Abused Women	57 Documents
Abused Men	0 Documents
Abused Female(s)	0 Documents
Abused Male(s)	5 Documents
Abused Wife(ves)	2 Documents
Abused Husband(s)	0 Documents
Battering Spouse(s)	0 Documents
Battering Men	0 Documents
Battering Women	0 Documents
Battering Female(s)	0 Documents
Battering Male(s)	0 Documents
Battering Husband(s)	0 Documents
Battering Wife(ves)	0 Documents
Battering	176 Documents
Battered Woman's Syndrome	1 Documents
Battered Man's Syndrome	0 Documents
The Conflict Tactics Scale	0 Documents
Violence Against Females	0 Documents
Violence Against Males	0 Documents
Violence Against Husbands	0 Documents

Violence Against Wives	57 Documents
Violence Against Spouses	0 Documents
Violence Against Women	43 Documents
Violence Against Men	0 Document
Violent Spouse(s)	0 Document
Male Assault	0 Documents
Female Assault	0 Documents
Wife Assault	29 Documents
Husband Assault	0 Documents
Spousal Assault	11 Documents
Wife Abuse	48 Documents
Husband Abuse	0 Document
Spousal Abuse	114 Documents
Female Abuse	0 Documents
Male Abuse	0 Documents
Family Violence	88Documents
Spousal Violence	0 Documents
Total Number of Articles Found	1114 Documents

APPENDIX D
Articles Utilized From the Toronto Star

Anderson, Doris (April 26, 1991) "Husbands Get Away With Murder"

Andrus, Rob (May 24, 1996) "Ex-boyfriend Jailed for Life in Killing"

Armstrong, Jane (March 20, 1996) "Legal System Fails Women, Groups Say Shakeup Urged After Star Series on Domestic Violence"

Armstrong, Jane (March 23, 1996) "Ontario Eyes 'Better Ways' to Handle Spousal Abuse, Harnick Seeking Tougher System"

Armstrong, Jane (May 3, 1996) "[Metro Police Officers Investigating Domestic Violence Will Have To...]"

Armstrong, Jane (July 24, 1996) "Special Abuse Court Urged"

Armstrong, Jane, Daly, Rita and Mallan, Caroline (March 14, 1996) "[Adding Up the Costs While Domestic Violence Exacts a Huge Toll on Society, it Also Runs Up Massive Bills...]"

Armstrong, Jane, Daly, Rita and Mallan, Caroline (November 3, 1996) "[Case Not Closed as the Parade of Abusers and Abused Inches its Way Through the Justice System, One Fact Becomes...]"

Arsteinsen, Barbara (December 3, 1992) "Immigrants Stay Silent Longer About Abuse, Seminar Told"

Arsteinsen, Barbara (October 24, 1991) "Rowlands Under Fire For Views on Violence"

Associated Press (February 8, 1994) "Women Feel Media Backlash on Wife Abuse"

Associated Press (October 19, 1994) "Sympathetic Judge Gives Wife-Killer 18 Months"

Avery, Roberta (February 8, 2000) "Shelter Opens Door To Abused Women and Their Pets"

Avery, Roberta (May 17, 1997) "Student Suspended For Promoting March Protested Violence Against Women"

- Barnes, Alan (July 8, 1999) "Special Courts Tougher on Abusers: Study"
- Beattie, Rick (August 15, 2000) "StatsCan Defends Spousal Violence Study"
- Bindman, Stephen (July 14, 1995) "Battered Women Who Killed Win Reviews"
- Black, Debra (July 24, 2000) "A Day in the Life of K-Court"
- Black, Debra (August 12, 2000) "Abusive Men Try to Change Their Stripes"
- Black, Debra (August 26, 2000) "Police Take Domestic Violence More Seriously"
- Black, Debra (May 27, 1999) "Awards Honour Unsung Heroines Who Make it Their Mission to Fight Violence Against Women and Children"
- Black, Debra (July 31, 1997) "Domestic Abuse Called Silent, Hidden Crime"
- Black, Debra (March 13, 1996) "Where to Phone in Time of Danger"
- Black, Debra (March 23, 1996) "Knowing Where to Turn, Many Women Involved in an Abusive Relationship Feel Frightened and Confused"
- Blackwell, Tom (November 24, 1995) "Hostels For Abused To Get Cuts Review"
- Boyle, Theresa (July 11, 2000) "NDP Seeks Hike in Shelter Cash"
- Boyle, Theresa (September 28, 2000) "Tories to Get Tough on Domestic Violence"
- Boyle, Theresa (December 20, 2000) "Ontario Gets Tougher on Abuse"
- Brennan, Richard (January 26, 2000) "Domestic Violence Courts to Double in Ontario"
- Brent, Bob (August 29, 1993) "Attacker Slashes Mom, Kids at Home"
- Brett, Mary Ann (May 21, 1990) "Group Can Help Battered Women"
- Bruce, Harry (August 9, 1995) "Female Violence Needs Study, Society Neglects Growing Evidence of Aggressive Behaviour"

Byers, Jim (April 30, 1991) "\$12 Million Pledged to Help Assault Victims, Minorities"

Callaja, Frank (December 3, 1992) "Help on the Way for Victims of Wife Assault"

Canadian Press (February 10, 1993) "Woman Said 'I Love You' to Her Killer, Trial Told"

Canadian Press (February 20, 1991) "Ottawa Spending to Combat Violence"

Caplan, Gerald (March 8, 1992) "C'mon Guys - Help End Violence Against Women"

Cardozo, Andrew (April 16, 1996) "Domestic Violence Doesn't Know Any Ethnic Boundaries"

Cardozo, Andrew (February 17, 1993) "Refuge For Abused Women, Panel has Dragged its Heels on Refugee Status"

Carey, Elaine (July 26, 2000) "Abuse Rates Similar for Both Sexes"

Carey, Elaine (May 29, 1998) "Study Casts Harsh Light on Family Violence"

Carey, Elaine (March 17, 1996) "Police Favour Tough Line on Spousal Abuse, but They Fear Courts Want Victims to Testify"

Chapman, Geoff (March 19, 1992) "[Can Violence Against Women, an Issue at Last Being Treated...]"

Clancy, Lou (March 9, 1996) "Exposing a System That Doesn't Work"

Code, Michael (April 2, 1996) "Changing Way We Prosecute Spousal Assaults"

Crook, Farrell (March 20, 1998) "Allegations of Wife Assault Not Supported, Trial Told"

Crook, Farrell (September 29, 1992) "Wife Cut off Man's Penis in Jealous Rage, Jury Told"

Daly, Rita (July 24, 1996) "Report Urges More Training for Judges Insensitive to Behavior Noted During Domestic Abuse Trials"

Daly, Rita (July 25, 1996) "Counselling Costs to Delay New Domestic Assault Courts"

Daly, Rita (July 26, 1996) "Judges Face Complaints by Women: Group Considers Protests Over Conduct at Trials"

Daly, Rita (November 5, 1996) "No Escape For 'Sick' Spousal Abusers Harnick Vows Stiff Fight-Back Across Province"

Daly, Rita and Mallan, Caroline (March 10, 1996) "HITTING HOME: SPOUSAL ABUSE: Our System Isn't Working Top Crown Says"

Daly, Rita, Mallan, Caroline and Armstrong, Jane (March 16, 1996) "Hitting Back at Spousal Abuse: A Solution"

Daly, Rita and Tyler, Tracey (May 26, 1996) "Court to Target Spousal Abuse, North York Project to Focus on Causes Behind the Violence"

Darroch, Wendy (February 19, 1998) "Streets Safer Than Home For Women, Inquest Told Domestic Assaults 13 Times More Likely"

Darroch, Wendy (May 6, 1998) "Doctors May Have to Report all Domestic Assault Cases"

Darroch, Wendy (May 7, 1998) "Education Called Key to End Domestic Abuse"

Darroch, Wendy (May 10, 1994) "Abused Wife Imprisoned for Planning Murder Plot"

DeMont, Philip (February 9, 1990) "Plan to Identify Caller Faulted as Dangerous Privacy Threat"

Deverell, John (December 12, 1993) "Police Use New Protocol to Help Wife Abuse Victims"

Dimanno, Rosie (March 13, 1996) "Woman, 'Victim' Appear to be Couple Made for Each Other"

Dimanno, Rosie (November 20, 1995) "Myth Clouds Air at Panel on Domestic Violence"

Donovan, Kevin (April 5, 2000) "False Claims Anger Shelter Group"

Edwards, Peter (October 27, 1999) "Crime Stoppers to Take Domestic Violence Calls"

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APPENDIX E
Articles Utilized From the Toronto Sun

Amiel, Barbara (November 25, 1996) "Men's Movement is Feminization of Society"

Artuso, Antonella (January 26, 2000) "Spousal Abuse Courts Doubled"

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